- Physical fitness

Exercising to build endurance

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WHAT do jogging, walking, swimming, cycling and cardio workouts have in common?



They not only clear your mind after a stressful day or pep you up in the morning, but also train your endurance.
"Regular endurance training improves physical fitness and lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease," says Marcel Reuter, co-director of the Department of Training and Exercise Science at the German University of Applied Sciences for Prevention and Health Management in Saarbrücken, Germany.
Many people have a mental picture of endurance training that may dampen any interest in doing it though.
Whether on a bike, running route or exercise mat, they think they've got to work up a serious sweat and push their body to the limit.
Only then do the workouts have health benefits, right?
This picture fits high-intensity interval training (HIIT), in which you alternate a few minutes of intense exercise that "feels very strenuous" with brief periods of recovery, explains Reuter.
HIIT requires a high degree of resilience.
But what if you don't measure up? Or you simply don't want to exercise to the point of exhaustion?
Well, there's good news for you: Endurance training needn't be of high intensity to benefit your health.
An alternative is low-intensity steady state exercise (LISS).
Be it running, cycling or swimming, you do it with moderate intensity.
In other words, Reuter says: "it feels somewhat strenuous, but you don't breathe so heavily that you can't carry on a conversation."
The workouts are longer than HIIT ones though.
How much LISS exercise is necessary for health benefits?
The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that healthy adults do at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week.
So three 50-minute workouts a week would suffice. Which is better, HIIT or LISS? "Studies show that both methods improve physical fitness and have a positive effect on your health, for example, by lowering blood pressure and reducing body fat," Reuter says.
HIIT is more time-efficient though, since "you can achieve comparable or even better results more quickly," he notes.
According to WHO guidelines, at least 75 minutes of vigorous exercise a week meets a healthy adult's exercise requirement.
You can also combine moderate and vigorous exercise.
Your exercise goals, time budget, physical prerequisites – all of these things play a role when it comes to choosing a training regimen, Reuter says.
And don't forget: If you have a pre-existing health condition, such as a cardiovascular disorder, you should have a sports medical examination before you start. – dpa