

Rx: Vitamin Exercise

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Some people joke that the only time they run is if there is something chasing them. If that's true for you, then you might be tired of the "E" word subject of this column.

I'm going to press on, however, and ask your indulgence to read further, because if there is one prescription that nearly everyone needs, it's exercise.^ While it might not be the Elixir of Life, preventing mortality and promising everlasting youth and well-being, regular exercise offers amazing benefits:

- *It improves your mood* – exercise acts as a natural anti-depressant/anti-anxiety medication, reduces stress, and helps prevent burn-out: exercise
- *It decreases risks for chronic disease* – regular cardiovascular exercise can reduce or manage blood pressure, improve cholesterol, and help prevent type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and some types of cancer (including up to 60% reduction in the risk of breast cancer)
- *It improves cognitive functioning* – regular exercise improves the ability to focus, concentrate, and think clearly
- *It can increase self-esteem* – making the effort to exercise regularly, and beginning to see the benefits of improved fitness or weight loss, can help you feel better and begin to make positive changes in other areas of your life
- *It helps manage weight* – whether you need to lose a few pounds or want to maintain a healthy weight, exercise is key
- *It is good for your heart and lungs* – regular physical activity helps your entire cardiovascular system to work more effectively, helping you to feel healthier and more energetic
- *It can improve your ability to sleep, and the quality of your sleep* – as discussed in the previous column, regular exercise can help you to fall asleep more quickly and to sleep more deeply
- *It increases strength and stamina*, and
- *It can be fun!** Really. There are lots of ways to get a cardiovascular workout—and to get motivated.

Anything that gets you moving is a good thing. Consider the following:

- take a dance class;
- go hiking;
- take your dog(s) on long walks;
- go swimming;
- accompany a child (or go by yourself) to a playground to swing, climb, or jump rope;
- find a kick boxing or martial arts class at a local gym;
- use fun exercise videos.

Don't forget to include physical activity in your daily life: park at the end of the parking lot when you go to the grocery store or to work; remember that vacuuming and house cleaning get your heart pumping; choose the stairs instead of an elevator whenever possible; and take brief walking/stretching breaks throughout the day.

You might need ways to get motivated. Here are a few suggestions:

- find a friend to become an exercise buddy to motivate you and help hold you accountable;
- hire a personal trainer for a few sessions to help you get started;
- sign up for a local Fitness Boot Camp;
- join a neighborhood/amateur team sport—play soccer, volleyball, kickball, baseball, or basketball with others
- register for an upcoming walk/run/bike ride/triathlon in the future
- exercise for a cause: sign up for a race event that raises money for a cause you believe in (for example, the three-day walk for the cure to breast cancer or Team In Training to fight leukemia).

You never know – you might even end up running even when nothing is chasing you!

^Dependent on fitness level and recommendation by a physician.

*For 50 more benefits: <http://www.busywomensfitness.com/exercise-benefits.html>

See also suggestions from the Mayo Clinic:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/exercise/HQ01676>