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Introduction

It is a fact of modern life that most people do not exercise enough.

This, allied to a diet which is heavy on sugar and fat laden fast foods, has led to a tidal wave of overweight and obese people in most Western countries, a tidal wave that is becoming increasingly difficult to turn back.

The problem is that, for most people, it is all too easy and convenient not to take exercise.

If you need the basic everyday groceries – even if it is only a carton of milk or a loaf of bread – it is quicker and more convenient to hop in the car and drive to the store than walk.

If you have to get to the third or fourth floor when you go to the office, it is easier (although not always quicker) to take the elevator as opposed to the stairs.

Yet many people are willing to pay hundreds or even thousands of dollars every year to be a member of a gymnasium or a fashionable fitness club in order to stay in shape.

That really does not make a great deal of sense, so this book is here to tell you that it does not have to be that way!

I am going to show you how to keep your money in your pocket and exercise the natural way, in a way that you don't even really notice.

Mankind managed to survive for thousands of years before anyone ever came up with the idea of 'working out at the gym'.

Sure, the life expectancy of modern man has increased significantly over the past couple of hundred years, but I suspect that this has little to do with the proliferation of fancy fitness clubs and expensive gymnasia.

The good news is that exercise can be taken naturally every day. With a little thought, it is not difficult to think of lots of opportunities for taking exercise without resorting to spending your hard earned cash on fitness club fees.

Let us start by looking at why exercise is so important in modern life.

Why is exercise important?

For most people, taking or indulging in exercise tends to be a reactive thing. That is, there has to be something that happens in their life that forces them to re-assess what they are doing. Something happens that makes them realize that they need to exercise more as a way of changing things that are going wrong in their life.

For instance, many people come to a point in their life where they finally acknowledge what they have, in reality, known for a long time, that they are overweight or obese. Perhaps more importantly, having finally accepted that their weight truly does represent a problem, they actually make a conscious decision to do something about it. So, they go on a weight loss diet of some description and, for most people, taking exercise is part of the weight loss process.

The saddest part is that, if such overweight or obese people had regulated their calorie intake and taken regular exercise beforehand, they would never have got to be in the state that necessitates such drastic action.

Other people might decide to begin exercising in an effort to slow down the aging process, often at a point in their lives where they finally understand that the arrival of the grim reaper is a lot nearer than they previously imagined.

This is a good thing, but it is also a classic case of 'better late than never'. The fact is that if people who take up exercise late in life had only done so twenty or thirty years earlier, their efforts to delay the inevitable would have been more effective.

There lies the point about exercise that many people ignore. Exercise should not be something that is done reactively, at a point where it has to be done in an attempt to reverse something that has already happened.

Exercise should be viewed as a proactive step that everyone can indulge in as one of the best preventative measures that they can take.

Increased physical activity will increase your heart rate as well as strengthening all of the muscles of your body. The heart is after all only a muscle and all muscles get stronger the more often they are worked.

This resultant increase in heart activity will automatically speed up the blood circulation throughout your body, which will in turn deliver increased oxygen and nutrients to all your organs.

Regular exercise helps to increase the capacity of your lungs to absorb and utilize oxygen, is effective at reducing body fat, and lowers the levels of sugars and 'bad' cholesterol in the blood.

A program of regular exercise (if begun early enough) can help to slow down the inevitable aging process too.

Exercise will make the body stronger, and that equates to a body that is more resistant to illness and injury.

Taking regular exercise improves your overall quality of life as well. It makes you feel better physically and mentally.

It allows you to enjoy everything that you do much more than you previously did, because you have increased energy and vitality and that enables you to become more involved in whatever is going on.

These are all benefits that you can enjoy simply by starting taking exercise now, rather than waiting until you 'have to' for some reason or another.

So, am I advocating enrolling in one of the aforementioned 'fancy fitness clubs' or joining (and paying for) an expensive gym? Absolutely not!

There are dozens of opportunities to 'work out' during the course of the average day, and it really is only a question of making the correct choices, as you will see.

In some parts of the world, exercise is a natural part of life, because people in many places simply do not have the choices that those who live in the affluent countries of the West have.

For example, they do not eat burgers or fries every couple of days, because there is no fast food shop in the local mall (there is, in fact, no local mall).

They do not jump in the car to drive everywhere, because they do not have a car, and, as there are no buses either, they walk everywhere they go.

These people are forced to adopt a lifestyle that is in many ways healthier than that which most people in developed Western countries are used to, because they have no choice.

You do have a choice, and it is up to you to choose to live in a way that benefits you and your health, as opposed to harming it.

Part of that choice is taking regular exercise, and the sooner you start working your body a little more than you are at present, the better it will be.

Some sensible precautions

Exercise is good for you, but you need to make sure that you are in a condition to handle whatever you plan to do before you start.

Especially if you have not taken regular exercise for some time, it makes sense to get a thorough physical check-up before you begin with any exercise regime.

Tell your physician why you are having the check-up and what you plan to do, because they may have some advice or input that will help you rationalize your plans.

Understand also that the majority of people who have not exercised for some time should start off slowly, no matter what form of exercise they plan to follow.

Trying to do too much, too quickly could potentially be even more harmful than doing nothing at all, because the strain that it places on your body may be too much. The risk of injury or even worse is that much greater if you try to do things too quickly.

Another thing that you should do before beginning any regime of exercise is to acknowledge and accept your age and general physical condition.

While we all like to believe that we can still do things that we could do in our teens and twenties, when you reach the second half of your life the truth is, you simply cannot do what you could at one time.

Accept that and try to avoid seeing it as a challenge that has to be overcome. Doing so is likely to lead you to try to do too much, and again, that can significantly increase the risk of injury.

Getting injured is one of the surest ways of stopping your exercise program dead in its tracks, so the increased risk inherent in doing too much, too soon is really not worth it.

Walking is a good start

When was the last time that you walked anywhere?

I am not talking here about hiking over mountains and trudging down into deep sided valleys. I am not referring to route marches either.

Think about it. When was the last time that you made the effort to walk, rather than jumping in the car or hopping on the subway train?

Walking is one of the easiest and most effective forms of aerobic exercise (exercise that increases your heart rate and therefore your blood circulation) that there is and it is something that is available to everyone at no cost.

In fact, walking will actually save you money, as well as helping to protect the world that we live in.

It saves money on your gasoline bill and reduces the amount of automobile generated pollutants that are pumped into the atmosphere that we all breathe, for example.

Taking a regular walk helps lower the risk of heart disease, osteoporosis and some cancers, as well as reducing your body fat and lowering your blood pressure. Unlike many other forms of exercise (e.g. jogging), walking is low impact and low intensity, so the risk of injury is minimized as well.

If you walk a couple of kilometers to the store instead of taking the bus or subway, then you do yourself some good as well as keeping a dollar or two in your pocket.

Walking is something that you can do anytime, anywhere and at absolutely zero cost. All that you need are a pair of comfortable shoes, preferably with cushioned soles to protect your feet and leather uppers (or ones made of other natural materials such as canvas) that will allow your feet to breathe.

Many modern athletic shoes are constructed entirely of synthetic materials (generally, some form of plastic) and wearing them therefore leads to an unhealthy build up of sweat. This can lead to fungal conditions like athlete's foot, and having such a condition would seriously curtail your exercise program, so wearing the right shoes from the beginning is extremely important.

Perhaps you think that you have no time or opportunity to walk?

Let me tell you, that is just an excuse.

Everyone has the opportunity to walk if they are willing to make minor adjustments to the way they live their everyday life.

For example, if you take public transport to work every day – the subway train or bus – how about getting off a couple of stops early and walking the

rest of the way? It will add five minutes to your journey time, but if that can add a couple of extra years to your life, wouldn't you consider that to be a reasonable trade-off?

Have you ever thought of walking the children to school, rather than piling them into the back of the SUV and driving them the one kilometer that it takes? Walking it would not only be good for you, but it also teaches your children good habits from an early age, and there is research which indicates that children who are taught that walking is a good idea when they are young tend to continue doing it throughout their later life.

You protect your own health and that of your children for years to come with just one small change in your daily routine.

What about taking the dog for a walk in the morning and once again, last thing at night?

You don't have a dog? You don't need a pooch with a pedigree, so go to the local dog rescue center or shelter and find yourself a new four legged friend.

Walking the dog in this manner might mean getting out of bed ten minutes earlier, but, as I suggested earlier, isn't that a reasonable trade off for a few extra years?

Sometimes, no matter how good your intentions are, you will have to use the car. If, for example, you work in a remote place without adequate public transport, or you need to go to the local mall for a full weeks' grocery shopping, then you probably have little choice but to drive.

In this situation, how about parking the car in the car park at the furthest point from your destination, and walking a few hundred meters?

If you are shopping, you are going to push a trolley with all of your groceries in it from the store to your car, so that adds a bit of extra effort (i.e. exercise) to what you are doing, and if you are working, then you are not going to be carrying anything heavy every day, so there is no excuse for not doing this!

How much walking should I do?

The answer to that question is, the more walking you can do, the better it is likely to be and the more your health will benefit.

At the beginning at least, take it reasonably easy with short ten minute periods of walking. Start each walk relatively slowly and gently, speeding up in the middle, and finish with a brief 'cool down' when you slow to a stroll.

Gradually (but not too gradually) build this up to walking at least 30 minutes a day at least five times a week, although it is not necessary that you exercise for the full thirty minutes in the one session. Three ten minute

walks would, for example, be equally effective, so if that fits in better with your daily routine, then that is the way to go.

However, you should also appreciate that thirty minutes per day five times a week is the minimum time that you should aim to be walking, not your ultimate target. If you can manage an hour a day, that is even better!

If you are going to take your walking seriously (and remember that we are talking about your health and well-being here, so you should) then you might want to invest in a pedometer with which you can count the number of steps that you take every day.

Use this to establish how many steps you take in a normal 'non-walking' day, and then attempt to increase that number by at least 2,000 more steps as your initial target.

At a brisk walking pace, that represents a couple of extra kilometers a day, so it is a good start, but this should be considered to be a start only. Aim to increase this figure as much as you are able and your health will inevitably benefit from your efforts.

It is only natural that there will be times when you are less motivated than others to actually take your walk. This is when having a dog to exercise with can be a big motivator, or taking the kids out walking would serve a similar purpose.

Failing that, walking can be a very sociable form of exercise too, so how about trying to round up a group of friends or work colleagues to go walking together?

Some of those people are probably paying out hundreds of dollars in gym membership fees at this very moment, and if you can show them how they can get exactly the same exercise benefits for free, then they are more than likely to take you up on your challenge.

Forget the elevator

Many people, especially those who live in congested cities, work in office tower blocks. They use the elevator every day of their lives to get from the ground to whatever floor their office is on.

Still others use elevators in department stores, apartment towers and so on.

Forget the elevator and take the stairs, because climbing stairs is one of the most effective forms of aerobic exercise that you can ever do.

This was clearly proven by a British study some ten years ago, when researchers discovered that for averagely sedentary people, just a few minutes climbing the stairs every day demonstrably improved their cardiovascular health.

This study was of particular interest because it supported the idea that taking several short spurts of exercise every day will make a significant difference to your health (hence the idea that you can walk for ten minutes a day three times, rather than just one thirty minute session).

The study required 20 college aged women who lived relatively sedentary lives to climb up 200 steps in less than two and a half minutes.

This represented a 'brisk but comfortable' pace according to the researchers conducting the study, but the first time that they did it, it nevertheless served to shoot the test subjects' heart rates up to around 90% of the anticipated maximum heart rate.

Despite this, the test subjects moved from making one climb per day during the first week to six per day in the sixth and seventh weeks.

This therefore meant that the test subjects were climbing stairs for around thirteen and a half minutes per day by the conclusion of the test, which (in case the point is not clear) represents less than a quarter of an hour of reasonably rigorous exercise every day.

By the end of this relatively modest (and completely free) exercise program, the women being tested were measurably fitter than they had been before. Every indicator had improved significantly. Their heart rate immediately after the climb had decreased markedly and their breathing had slowed as well, indicating that they needed to take in less oxygen to 'fuel' their efforts.

On the other hand, their HDL levels had increased, which is a good thing, because high-density lipoprotein is also sometimes known as 'good' cholesterol. High levels of HDL in the blood seem to play a role in reducing the risk of heart attack, while low levels seem to do the opposite by increasing the risk of heart disease.

It is clear just how effective climbing the stairs can be as exercise, and it is even more so if you take the stairs that you are climbing two at a time.

This significantly increases the work that your leg muscles have to do, and that in itself increases the aerobic effects of your exercise by a noticeable degree.

This all goes to prove one thing.

You do not have to exercise for hours at a time to enjoy the benefits that a 'work-out' will bring. Less than 15 minutes of stair climbing a day will improve your overall aerobic health significantly, and will cost you nothing at all.

So, the next time you go to the office or the department store and feel tempted to get into a packed, hot and sweaty elevator, think about it for a moment.

Does that really seem like a better option than giving your whole body a good workout?

Working out in the house and garden

In the final analysis, exercise is nothing more than making your body work, burning energy using your muscles in order to achieve certain objectives that you set yourself.

In times gone by, when physical labor was much more common and important, man did not really need to worry about what is essentially an artificial requirement as a way of burning off energy.

Nowadays, the general Western lifestyle involves very little work-based physical labor, hence the need to think of ways to exercise.

Running a house and home does require work and effort, however, and so, whether you realize it or not, you are exercising every time you attempt any kind of task around the house.

For example, many women would find using the vacuum cleaner and dusting the house to be a tedious and tiresome chore. Cleaning the windows, ironing and doing the washing up would probably not come high on the list of enjoyable pastimes either!

Yet all these activities represent exercise that you do not even know you are doing, as evidenced by the fact that 15 minutes of vacuuming and dusting will burn an extra 40 kilocalories for a 40 year old woman who weighs 78 kilos and is 165 centimeters tall.

That is not a massive amount, but it does indicate that work is being done, and therefore exercise of a sort is being taken, even without realizing it.

Mowing the lawn, digging in the garden and pulling up the weeds will have a similarly beneficial effect, with fifteen minutes of doing this kind of activity burning off over fifty calories for the same lady.

Given that 'gardening' is an activity that many people enjoy and spend many hours involved in, there is the potential here for a serious work-out. I would suspect that most people would never consider this to be exercise, so that makes it far easier to do.

Is the car dirty? If so, forget the idea of taking it to the car wash, as hand washing it yourself has many benefits. Not only will you save the money that you would otherwise have spent on the car wash and do your bit to help the environment, you also get to stretch – you have to reach over the car roof – bend and work your muscles. These are muscles that you generally don't use if you work in a sedentary office environment.

In the case of washing the car, even going at a nice, gentle pace – it is not a race, after all – you will still be burning 150 kilocalories per hour ...