GET UP AND GET MOVING!

by Kathiann M. Kowalski

It’s too hot. You’re tired. You don’t have time. If you think those are good reasons to avoid exercise, maybe you’d better think again.

Science says we’ll all be healthier if we get moving. Indeed, the U.S. government’s 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans (the Guidelines) recommend an hour or more of activity daily for children and teens.

10 REASONS YOU DON’T EXERCISE

1. Your clothes would get sweaty.
2. Your hair would get messy.
3. It’s cold out.
4. It’s hot out.
5. You’re tired.
6. You’d rather sleep.
7. You don’t like to exercise alone.
8. You don’t like to have people see you exercise.
9. Your muscles will get sore.
10. You don’t have time.
recommend that they do three different types of activity at least three days each week: **Vigorous aerobic activity** that gets the heart beating faster; **muscle-strengthening activities** that use the body’s weight or other resistance to tone muscles; and **bone-strengthening exercises** that usually involve some force or impact on the body.

“There is some overlap,” explains Fulton. For example, jumping rope is aerobic activity that also strengthens bones. Climbing on monkey bars strengthens muscles while also raising the heart rate.

**UNDERSTAND THE BENEFITS**

The long-term benefits of regular physical activity include longer life expectancy, better weight management, and better overall health. Physical activity also lowers risks for many diseases, including heart disease, stroke, and some cancers.

“I basically, there’s no system that it doesn’t have a positive effect on, at least when done in moderation,” says Antronette Yancey at the University of California at Los Angeles. She served on the Guidelines’ expert committee. More importantly, Yancey says, physical activity “can produce immediate benefits.”

For starters, regular physical activity improves your overall fitness. Your bones and muscles grow stronger. You can do more before tiring. And exercise can bolster the immune system, so you’re less likely to get sick.

**THE WHITE HOUSE SAYS, “LET’S MOVE!”**

Physical activity is key to First Lady Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move” campaign to lower obesity rates in children and teens. Currently, nearly a third of American children are overweight or obese. Being active makes it easier to avoid unhealthy weight gain.

“It gives you time to blow off steam,” adds 16-year-old Matthew Kowalski, also on Long Island. He really welcomes physical activity after a long day of sitting and concentrating at school.

Interestingly, researchers at East Carolina University found that students stayed on task better when classes included regular exercise breaks throughout the day. Other studies suggest that regular physical activity improves decision-making and planning abilities. That includes “being able to accomplish what you’re trying to accomplish, being creative, and not making bad judgments,” explains Yancey.

**OVERCOME INERTIA**

Part of Isaac Newton’s first law of physics says that a body at rest tends to stay at rest. Unfortunately, that holds for our exercise habits, too.

“The important thing is finding something that’s fun to do,” stresses Fulton. Charlie likes soccer and fencing. Danielle runs and does yoga. Matthew plays hockey and lacrosse and runs track.

Being with friends helps. “Running around circles for track isn’t all that fun,” admits Matthew. “But when it’s you and five guys, and as you’re running, each guy has a joke, it makes it that much better.”

Of course, everyone is busy, so Fulton also advises, “Build activity into your life.” Charlie often walks to and from school or to friends’ houses. Yancey wants kids to go further and push schools to add “instant recess” breaks throughout the day. “It needs to be an ordinary part of the day,” Yancey says. Just as many restaurants and offices are now non-smoking places, she says, schools and offices should become places of no prolonged sitting.

In the meantime, enlist friends’ help, and motivate each other to stay active. ‘I’m someone calls me up and says, “I’m going running. Do you want to come?”’ says Danielle. “I go, ‘Why not?’”

And on days when you might make excuses, remember how good a physical activity can make you feel. “I realize that when I get to hockey, it will be better there than me just sitting at home doing homework,” says Matthew. “As soon as I get on that ice, I’ll be glad I’m there.”

So, get moving, have fun, and get (or stay) healthy!
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