

Burn off that Easter chocolate with exercise for better health and toning

Trevor Eddolls looks at some fact-based advice for burning calories and getting the most benefits from any exercise you do.



Often hypnotherapists are asked by weight management clients for some hints and tips on how they can lose weight, and the therapists often doesn't know much more than any other member of the public about what works and what doesn't, and probably suggests they join gym. Anyone looking to get fit should seek the advice of a fully qualified personal trainer and perhaps go to see their doctor if they are concerned about aspects of their health.

Obviously, in terms of general health, then there are two things people can do straight away that will make them feel healthier: Stop smoking – statistics indicate that smoking shortens a person's life by eight years.

Eat their five a day – eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day extends a person's life by four years (mainly by reducing the risk of heart disease).

While joining a gym is good, actually going is better! Once the client is there, then research suggests it seems that aerobic training is better for their brain than just toning and stretching exercises.

Worryingly, a study of people between 1971 and 2009 found that the least fit people are almost twice as likely to go on to develop dementia than the fitter people. So it's well worth getting fit for just that reason.



Numerous reports suggest fitness is more important than fatness. One Dallas study, conducted over eight years, found fit people lived longer than unfit people, irrespective of their weight.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, a 2013 University of Illinois report found that exercise plus diet produced the biggest weight loss in people (in a study stretching over six months). But just doing exercise isn't the complete answer. Excessive exercise can damage your joints and so take the advice of that all important qualified personal trainer or gym instructor. For people who haven't exercised for a while then a trip to see your GP may also be helpful prior to starting to exercise.

Research indicates that jogging can add about four years to a person's life. But it's best for clients not to jog for too long and not every day. In fact, it's best for them to jog for about 20 minutes every other day. Doing more running doesn't seem to result in an equivalent amount of more benefit.

VO2 max is a measure of the maximum amount of oxygen that a person's body can use while they are doing intense exercise. It's an indirect measure of how good a person's heart and lungs are at getting oxygen into and round their body. VO2 max increases in response to exercise and people with good aerobic fitness are less likely to get heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or dementia.

So, how much exercise should you do? Well, a University of Pittsburgh study in 2008 found women in the 2-year study needed to do a whopping 70 minutes of exercise five days a week to keep their weight down. Eating a banana gives you 90 calories, which you can burn off by running 1.1 miles or walking for 50 minutes. A large chocolate muffin (480 calories) would require a 6-mile run or walking for three hours and 20 minutes. A pound of fat has 3500 calories in it, which means to lose that pound of fat would require you to run for an hour a day for six days.

Alternatives to running are available, what about weight lifting? Apparently, a gentle stroll burns more calories. And even the thought of doing exercise can encourage some people to eat more in readiness. A 2012 study found that people lose less weight than they expect because:

- They underestimate how much exercise is needed to shift fat
- They compensate by eating more



.....
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.....

- Exercise has less effect in maintaining your metabolic rate than was thought.

It seems that running for an hour a day for five days a week (without any additional eating) produces a weight loss of about 3lbs in the first month. After six months, the monthly weight loss will be down to half (1.5lbs). After 12 months, it will produce a weight loss of a mere 0.4lbs.

So, what works and doesn't take up hours in a day?

The answer seems to be High Intensity Training (HIT). It takes three bouts of 20 seconds, three times a week to lose weight, particularly around the stomach, and also to help avoid type 2 diabetes. Studies show that HIT will get you aerobically fitter and improve insulin sensitivity faster than standard exercise. It's also the most time-efficient way to build muscle tone and lose fat.

An Australian study compared women doing three lots of 40 minute moderate intensity cycling against a HIT group alternating 8-second sprints and 12 seconds gentle cycling. After 15 weeks, both groups were fitter, but only the HIT group had lost weight, the other group actually put on weight. For a similar test with men, it took six weeks of HIT before they started losing fat. So, perhaps it is fair to say that there may be a time lag before they start to see results.

When it comes to eating, a French study found that people doing HIT actually ate less than people who weren't, indicating that HIT curbs people's appetite. Studies using buffet meals show that most people eat more if they think they are going to do exercise, and reward themselves with food once they have.

But what exercise your clients do is only part of the story. There's a huge variation in how people respond to an exercise regime, and this seems to be explained by 11 genes out the whole human genome (an estimated 20,000-25,000 human protein-coding genes). The more 'positive' genes your clients have, the fitter they will be and the bigger improvement in all areas they will make. The fewer 'positive' ones they have, the harder they'll find it to increase muscle strength and VO2, for example.

So, the bottom line for clients trying to lose weight is that they can do it with much less effort than they thought. But they do need to eat fewer calories and they do need to exercise – it's just that the exercise won't take up too much of their time to get a positive effect. HIT has a proven track record (Roger Bannister used it to train for his famous sub-four-minute mile run in 1953). But there are some people who have the wrong genes to ever aspire to being a top athlete.

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