

# Physical Exercise - Is it really worth the effort?



**By: Dr. John P. Glynn**

Published: The Criterion

April 2012

A Science of Medicine  
The Art of Care

Yes! According to Tibb. There is no doubt that we benefit in both body and mind from regular physical exercise. Not only that - it also increases our life expectancy, delays the onset of several chronic diseases, and improves our resistance to infection. Even if we have been sick, or recovering from cancer therapy, we will still gain a lot from regular physical activity. We also know that an inactive person is likely to have the lowest level of fitness, and is at the highest risk for chronic lifestyle diseases.

Whether or not we exercise is an important lifestyle choice. For instance, we are at real risk of heart and blood circulation disease if we have too-high blood pressure, or if our blood contains too much cholesterol or sugar, or if we smoke. Also if we lead a passive, inactive life. The reality is that if these so-called risk factors are not reduced, then the chances of a heart attack, stroke and kidney problems increase alarmingly. Unfortunately, About 30% of South Africans are inactive both at work and during their leisure time.

That's the bad news. And the good? For many years now has recognised that physical activity has a very positive influence on our quality of life. Simple, short-term, regular exercises lessen the risk of developing several chronic diseases. These same exercises counteract the worrying trend to overweight and obesity, and their close relative, diabetes - a trend which has the health authorities very concerned because of the serious health problems these disorders bring on. They also help relieve mental and emotional disorders like insomnia and anxiety.

We don't have to be an athlete to gain from physical exercise. Even mild exercises like walking, gardening, swimming and household chores offer important benefits. More so with moderate exercises (which makes you sweat a little and breathe faster), such as cycling, jogging and dancing. And the time needed should not be a real problem - only thirty minutes daily, or thereabouts, three to six times weekly. Also, short periods of exercise through the day offer similar benefits to a gym session. The important thing is to carry out exercise regularly. There is no quick fix with exercise, unfortunately.

Once we agree that regular physical exercise is a valuable route to improving our state of health, what sort of exercise should we consider? Basically there are three types - aerobic, stretching, and strength training.

- Aerobic exercises are continuous and flowing, and include brisk walking, jogging, cycling, and gym aerobics themselves. These can be pleasant and sociable, which for many of us is a strong incentive to continue. They really benefit our heart, lungs and blood circulation.
- Stretching exercises are more suitable for the very unfit and elderly amongst us, and for pregnant women. These increase blood flow to different tissues, improve balance and body coordination, and help to relax the muscles.
- Overall, our physical performance is improved substantially.
- Strength training (sometimes called isometrics or resistance training) involves building up muscle by the use of weights. This is really for our younger, fitter and dedicated friends and colleagues.

What we should be aware of is that we respond differently to certain exercises. Tibb recognises that the benefit we get from exercise depends to some extent on our temperament. This is a measure of our personality, our physical make up and our behaviours. What's more, the fundamental objective in exercising is to support and stimulate our inner healing mechanisms, or physis, so that we are better able to ward off chronic diseases and infections, recover from diseases, and return to full health. In view of this, Tibb has devised a number of physical exercises which take into account our temperament, and are suitable for our physical condition.

Tibb also feels that if we are to benefit most from these exercises, we need to examine other aspects of our daily living. For a start, our daily food intake, both the amount and its nature, needs to be looked at. In addition, the way we handle stress and other emotional difficulties should be examined, and the quality of our sleep. The way we breathe is also important, and Tibb has long recognised this by devising a number of breathing exercises. In Tibb, elimination of waste products is a major, but usually unrecognised, Lifestyle Factor.

There are hurdles facing us before taking up exercise seriously as a health-promoting habit, besides lack of time and disruption to our social life. The main one is about actual value. Are we completely convinced of its real and lasting benefits? The evidence in favour is strong, and getting stronger by the day. Those who exercise regularly are less prone to a wide range of chronic physical and mental disorders, are less likely to develop certain cancers, are less inclined to go down with infectious diseases, and cope better with the rigours of ageing. Exercise will help keep us fit and flexible for longer, and lets us take a full and active part in the family's and community's activities. So to answer the original question ñ is it really worth the effort? The answer is yes!