

# Health and Exercise

Medical research has recently shown that exercise is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle for women. Research has shown that there are many areas in which exercise can benefit women, including breast, reproductive, and colon cancers, osteoporosis and fractures, functional independence in old age, heart disease, weight control and mental health.

## Cancers

Several studies over the past few years have shown that regular physical activity decreases a woman's risk for breast, ovarian and colon cancers. Some types of cancers have high-risk factors associated with any increases in estrogen levels. Estrogen levels are often at a rise during puberty and late menopause when a woman is undergoing estrogen replacement therapy. Some researchers attest that exercise protects against these cancers by decreasing a woman's lifetime exposure to estrogen. Exercise is often associated with effects on body composition. People who exercise regularly tend to be leaner, while individuals who do not exercise usually have higher estrogen levels and higher body fat levels. Exercise activities are also associated with a reduced risk of colon cancer for both men and women. Exercise may exert its protective effect by



## Stay Healthy

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a speedy passage of waste through the colon, thus reducing exposure of the intestinal lining to harmful substances. Some researchers have also proposed that physical activity decreased the risk of cancer because physical activity is associated with an increased immune response allowing the body to fight off cancerous type cells.

## Osteoporosis and Fractures

Many women fear the loss of bone density that occurs with aging, especially the accelerated loss that occurs during the menopausal years. Women are at a much higher risk than men for disease such as osteoporosis. However, most

studies agree, activities that place more stress on muscles and bones may lead to the greatest protection against such diseases as osteoporosis. It has been shown that women, who participate in strength training exercises such as light weight lifting, suffer less from decreases in bone density. Weight strengthening is also associated with increased balance and performance, which helps prevent falls that may lead to fractures later on in life.

## Quality of Life in Old Age

Women have a tendency to live longer than men and make up the majority of the older population. Many older women, however, often live alone and are concerned about losing their quality of life and level of independence as their age advances. Women are often forced to institutional type living situations because they no longer have the strength to perform daily tasks such as carrying groceries and going upstairs. Recent research has shown that high intensity strength training can lead to increases in muscle size and strength even in the senior female population and improves their quality of life.

## **Heart Disease**

Research scientists have known for years that exercise reduces heart disease for men; however, recent research has been done to observe the facts on women and exercise. Exercise has proven to prevent or control a number of important disorders that increase the risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and triglycerides, and obesity in women. Many women, however, still feel that they are not at significant risk for heart disease because more men suffer from heart disease than women. However, heart disease is still one of the major causes for death in women at this time.

## **Weight Control**

Research has shown that at least a third of North American women are overweight, which places them at an increased risk for diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and cancer. The best way to control weight is through a healthy low fat diet and plenty of regular exercise. Lifelong physical activity is essential for weight control and good health, even exercises such as walking, dancing, swimming, cycling helps burn calories and improves the

overall fitness level. This should be combined with strength training when possible. Strength training increases muscle size and raises metabolic rate so women can eat more without gaining weight.

## **Mental Health**

Perhaps the most important benefit of exercises is the psychological benefits that contribute to the quality of daily life. Regular physical activity has been shown to reduce symptoms of depression and improve the negative mood associated with pre-menstrual syndrome and menopause. Exercise not only decreases your risk of suffering from health related problems, but it also improves your overall quality of life.