

Live Healthy and Be Well!

“Get up and get out – do more, feel better, and live longer!”

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I'd like to start off by thanking all of you who read and comment that you find the articles helpful and useful. I would also be remiss if I did not thank Tracy McCoy and all the staff at this fine publication for allowing me to share information. Also, don't forget that this month is a “once in a lifetime” event in that a total eclipse of the sun will happen on August 21st at about 2:30 PM. We are fortunate that Rabun County is in the path of totality, so be sure and enjoy that event safely with friends and family. ***Do not look at the sun during this time without special protection or your eyes could be permanently damaged.***

Now, what if I told you one of the best “medicines” in the world was easily available, infinite supply, and costs you nothing? It will help you do more, feel better, enable you to be healthier, and is totally free? Are you ready to walk or run and get some? Well, that's good. But to have this superb benefit, you don't have to walk or run anywhere – just walk or run!

August is a great month for this topic – increased physical activity and its overall benefits to your health and well-being. We continue the series inspired by writings of Dr. Sanjiv Chopra in a book titled *The Big 5* - which presents “...five simple things you can do to live a longer, healthier life.” For August, let's discuss the great benefits of increasing your physical activity – walking, hiking, running, biking, aerobic exercise, and even strength training.

So many studies have found that increasing physical exercise is so good for you in so many ways. We know that even a small amount of vigorous exercise each week can pay off in terms of increased health, wellness, prevention of disease, weight loss and maintenance of healthy weight, and can even make you smarter! The most obvious benefits come from strengthening your heart, lungs, and overall cardiovascular fitness. This will lower the risk of future heart disease, stroke, and vascular disease such as arterial blockage and venous insufficiency.

In 2008, a government panel sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services reviewed many studies conducted over a long period of time. Their conclusion, reported by the Surgeon General was that regular physical activity can cut the risk of heart attack and stroke by at least 20 percent. They went on to state that these benefits extend to preventing high blood pressure, prevented development or progression of type 2 Diabetes, colon cancer, breast cancer, age related bone fractures (osteoporosis), and can also be a factor in the prevention of both anxiety and depression.

What is even better news is the finding that if you already have some of the above conditions, starting exercise now can make them better, improve your overall health, keep chronic conditions from worsening, and help you live longer!

One true benefit of increased exercise (that we all like) is that it helps with weight loss and the maintenance of a healthy weight. To do this, though, it must be coupled with reduction in calorie intake, usually by making smart choices and “portion control.” If you will eat healthy, fresh foods until your hunger subsides (but do not overfill), skip snacks and limit sugar, drink water and keep hydrated, and increase your activity and exercise – I can almost guarantee weight loss if you will be patient and stick with it. If you are already diabetic, increasing your activity will also help you with your blood sugar control, and help to increase “good” cholesterol levels in your body – also a plus.

Exercise on a regular basis can also help lower stress, improve your attitude, ease anxiety, and help to prevent and relieve depression. This mostly has to do with increasing blood flow to the brain, but whatever the reason – these are all good outcomes. Scientists have also found that it can improve your memory and ability to execute higher level brain functions. In animal studies, it was seen to increase the number of brain cells concerned with higher level function and memory. People studied were found to learn lists of vocabulary words faster and better after working out. They also report feeling better, less depressed and anxious if they exercise frequently – not to mention being smarter.

So, it is easy to see that increasing your activity is good for you in so many ways. But, how much is enough, and what should you do? Well, that is an individual choice based on motivation and ability. But just know that a brisk walk for 20 to 30 minutes three to five times a week can give you many of the benefits we have discussed. Also, some resistance or “weight” training on a regular basis also helps to increase muscle mass and keep bones healthy and strong. You don’t have to run a marathon, but be more active in all you do. Take the stairs, park further away and walk to the store, do some light aerobics, get a “pedometer” device and try to increase your steps daily – along with challenging friends and family to keep you straight. And on that note, working out with a friend will always result in a better session – no matter what you decide to do.

You don’t have to do a lot. You may not be able to do a lot. Start out slow at first, and get used to more and more activity. You will be encouraged as you see it beginning to pay off in your life, and hopefully will keep it up and gain more and more benefits in your overall level of health and wellness. For some great tips at increasing your activity across the board, visit the USDA website at <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/physical-activity-tips>

We really do enjoy hearing from you with any questions, concerns, or ideas for future columns and/or health and wellness related issues for the *Georgia Mountain Laurel*. Please send an email to rabundoctor@gmail.com, or call us at 706-782-3572, and we will be sure to consider your input. This and previous articles can be now be found on the web at www.rabundoctor.com in an archived format. If you use Twitter, then follow us for health tips and wellness advice @rabundoctor. Like and follow our Facebook page at facebook.com/rabundoctor. Until next month, live healthy and be well!