

Staying Alive

Physical activity, social rest fights depression, colds

Listen to your body. Unless you're ill, your body wants to move.

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It's a matter of moving. Forty thousand Norwegians can't be wrong. They were studied by groups from Kings College, London, and the University of Bergen with a simple question—does exercise decrease depression?

The answer was yes—by about half. With depression now affecting up to 30 percent of Western populations, that is a highly useful result.



Two other results were also important: one, physical activity only made a difference if done during leisure time. Working out as a result of the job did not confer the same anti-depressant effects. And two, much of the results were mediated by social support and social rest. The folks who were physically active and did it with friends, family and colleagues seemed to have a lot better results than when acting alone.

These findings fit many others; when you follow human design, you get better health. In this case combining physical rest with social rest, two critical ways of restoring body and mind, seemed to work synergistically. A reduction of depressive symptoms by half is impressive, particularly as there is a large genetic component to the illness.

And there are other benefits reported, including fighting one of mankind's oldest enemies. Researchers at Appalachian State asked a thousand people to keep dia-

ries of physical activity and cold symptoms over three months. Physical activity counted at 20 minutes and particularly if people at least broke a sweat.

The result—a reduction by half of the number of colds for those who were most active or considered themselves very fit. When these groups got colds, it lasted a little more than half as long as those who had little physical activity, and their symptoms were appreciably less severe as well. Interestingly, the overall intensity of exercise did not seem to make much difference.

The researchers theorized that immune cells became more active for several hours after exercise, and this activity markedly decreased the incidence, length and severity of cold symptoms.

What it means

Lots of people know "they should exercise." The question is what constitutes exercise, and the answer is relatively simple—moving your carcass.

You don't have to do that much. Humans are walking machines. Walking for 20 to 30 minutes a day will grow new brain cells, help cut depression rates, even markedly decrease the number and severity of colds.

The point is that human design is simple. Listen to your body. Unless you're ill, your body wants to move. You don't have to go to the gym. You don't need expensive gear. You just have to move. Remember, sitting for more than six hours a day is an independent risk factor for death.

So it really helps to walk with a work colleague to lunch or to stroll with the family after dinner. You not only cut your risk of severe disease by these most ordi-



LBK Special

Regular exercise is the best ally for the more than 20 million people in the United States whom experience depression.

nary of activities, but you combine social with physical rest; get the many benefits of light, for which vitamin D is now getting the media attention; and have the pleasure of talking about your life, your dreams and your work with the people you care about.

Using your body the way it's built really does work. Ordinary activities can produce extraordinary results, especially to optimize health. And your sense of feeling well.

Dr. Edlund directs the Center for Circadian Medicine, and is an internationally recognized expert on rest, biological clocks, performance, and sleep. His new book, "The Power of Rest", shows that rest is a skill that rebuilds, renews, and rewires mind and body, and can increase productivity, health and pleasure.

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