

Aerobic Exercise: Reward or Punishment?

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“A lower resting heart rate during stress means you tend to stay calmer and more in control of your emotions. But there are even more important consequences: To put it bluntly, a well-conditioned heart may save a person’s life” –Dr Kenneth Cooper

Aerobic exercise is often the topic of the day. Even more so when the latest studies indicate that one third of Canadians are overweight, costing taxpayers 2 billion a year in medical care. Why is it so difficult to practice a simple fitness regimen, when we are all aware that is so necessary for our well being?

Kahlil Gibran wrote: “The lust for comfort murders the passion of the soul”. What a great quote! I have often wondered if people fear exercising because of the “changes” it might bring to their personal or professional lives: increased self-esteem, stronger character traits, bolder self-confidence, increased creativity, sexier body. Deepak Chopra once wrote that one cannot change his/her physical body before changing his/her awareness. Everything that happens to you is a result of how you see yourself.

The other day, one of my clients asked me this really good question: “Dominique, how long will it take for me to come to a point in my fitness routine where I will say: I WANT to go for a walk today instead of saying I SHOULD go for a walk today”? What lies at the root of this question is how much you love your self, and by self I mean your “whole self”, meaning you’re emotional, physical, spiritual body. Taking time to exercise is not a selfish endeavour but a necessity, a requirement for wholeness! Self-worth and selfishness are not the same.

Outdoor aerobic exercise is how I build my emotional hardiness, clear my mind, improve my concentration, strengthen my stress coping mechanism and energise my self. After a good workout, I feel like a complete new person, ready to deal with life’s demands in a more positive, calmer way.

What follows are the most frequent excuses I hear as a lifestyle coach. How many of these are yours?

1. I am too tired - I can’t motivate myself after work!

We are often tired after a full day’s work. We get back home and all of a sudden, the morning’s resolutions of going for a walk or a jog after work has evaporated and we say to ourselves: “I will start tomorrow”! Then tomorrow becomes a week, a week becomes a month, a month becomes year, and a year becomes a considerable weight gain or a heart attack. What if “NOT EXERCISING” was “NOT AN OPTION”? Adopt this little mind trick for the next two weeks starting Monday. Whenever you find yourself debating to exercise or not, repeat to yourself: “not exercising today is not an option”. I know it sounds simple but this little mantra may produce everlasting results. Not racing because of foul weather was never an option for me as a sponsored athlete. That little mantra has saved me a lot of mental energy.

2. I have to pick the kids up after school.

And so do many parents! But not all parents have a car full of kids to bring back from school everyday of the week. I have heard great success stories where two parents shared the responsibilities of helping each other with bussing and sitting, alternating days to allow each other time to exercise. It does not take much to put a sense of balance back in one's life. I see many parents who are overweight, overstressed and overworked. One thing that concerns me is when mom or dad is so out of shape that she/he can not handle a run around the backyard with their child without "huffing & puffing". Playing with your children is a wonderful way to get back on track with your fitness regimen. Tobogganing is a great workout! Many opportunities are missed in life because of their simplicity. Let your child become your personal trainer. Pick your kid up from school on foot instead of on wheels.

3. I wrecked my back yesterday demolishing the house

Prevention is key! How often do I see people start a renovating or gardening project with so much zeal and enthusiasm. Never do they take in consideration the physical demands such projects will put on their sedentary bodies. Remember that by leading a sedentary lifestyle, you automatically increase your risk of physical injury and decrease your speed of recovery. Another great reason to keep fit, flexible and strong. For a sedentary person to start exercising, it is not the intensity that counts but the frequency of your workouts. Set realistic expectations for yourself and go at it slowly and wisely. Listen to your body! Take time to warm up properly, even for those home projects.

4. I just don't like to exercise - I find it boring - I don't see any fun in it!

I must admit, this is the excuse I have least patience for. Good health is a gift! I have worked too long with terminally ill and mentally/physically challenged to take my health for granted. When I hear this excuse, I ask myself: "Has this person lost so much touch with his/her physical self to the point that there is no more "natural need" to experience one's body in movement?" We are descendants of the great ape. What happened to running, jumping, swinging, and climbing? There is so much joy and dormant senses to awaken through movement. What would a cancer victim give for a second chance at life? If you are healthy, this excuse is simply not acceptable!

The list goes on and on, and believe me, it is very challenging to come up with creative solutions to every excuse in the book. That is what makes my work so enjoyable. But remember we live once and our health is truly a gift. If you are out of shape, just remember that it starts with a simple 30-minute brisk walk three times per week. There are 1,440 minutes in a day, and you only need 30 of them to make a difference. Believe me, that 30 minute is an energy investment with high returns.