

Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Hi Everyone!

Last month I mentioned that adults, whatever their age, need a minimum of 30 minutes exercise each day. But how do you define exercise? By "exercise" I mean that you should work at between 64-70% of your maximum heart rate to gain some improvement in fitness. Maximum heart rate is 220 minus your age. Therefore, if you were 50, the calculation would be: $220-50=170$, 65% of 170 is 110.5. Therefore you would need to increase your heart rate to around 110 to 119 beats per minute to improve your fitness.

If you take medication that affects blood pressure or heart rate then monitoring your heart rate would be inaccurate. In this case you would need to refer to the Borg Perceived Rate of Exertion Scale. This Scale has numbers from 1 to 20, with 1 being completely at rest and 20 working extremely hard. The aerobic zone (which is our 64-70% of maximum) would rate between 12 and 14 "somewhat hard" on this scale. So you need to get in touch with your body and rate how you are feeling, i.e. 8=very light, 15=hard. As your fitness improves, you can work harder to achieve your ideal perceived rate of exertion, as you would work harder to achieve your ideal heart rate.

As we should take time to exercise whenever we get the opportunity, we could also take time to stretch. Which muscles you choose to stretch depends upon what sort of exercise you do. For example if you walk or run you would need to stretch the muscles of the legs and back. If you swim, you may need to focus on your shoulders. Basically whatever muscles are used the most, need the most stretching. In my work, I see a lot of tight hamstrings, which can make one more prone to back pain. We get used to sitting on chairs with our feet down on the floor, which tightens the hamstrings.

Try and fit some stretching into your day as well as exercise. Stretching should only be done when the body is warm so is best performed immediately after exercise. For a walker/runner part of your stretching routine could be:

Calves: With the front half of your foot on a step, let your heel hang over the edge and downwards. Hold this with the leg straight (without locking the knee) for 15-30 seconds and then let the knee bend slightly. This will transfer the stretch from the calf to the achilles. Hold for a further 15-30 seconds and repeat on the other leg.

Quadriceps: Take hold of one foot and bring it as close to your buttock as possible. If you have trouble reaching use a belt or strap around the foot or you could rest the foot on the seat of a chair. Remember if you have a knee replacement to work within the range recommended by your surgeon. Once your foot is as close as possible, bring the knees together, lengthen both sides of the body and tuck your tailbone under. You should feel the stretch down the front of the thigh. Hold 15-30 seconds and then repeat on the other side.

Hamstrings: When sitting on a chair, rather than have your feet on the floor, bring them up onto a surface as high as your seat in front of you, or a little lower if you have tight hamstrings. Stretch your arms up into the air as high as possible and separate your front ribs, stretch and lengthen your spine. Maintain this length and slowly pivot forward from the hip joint until you can reach your feet. If you are unable to reach use a strap, belt or towel around your feet and hold onto this. Hold for at least 15 seconds. The longer you hold this, the more your hamstrings will lengthen and with practice you will eventually reach your feet or beyond.

Remember to work with your body and not against it. Never work through pain. Enjoy!

Yours in health,

Jeni

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