



TEACHING TIPS: PHYSICAL EXERCISE

When we exercise or do any physical activity, we use the muscles of our body. This movement is possible only because we have muscles. There are several good reasons why each of us needs to get the right kind of regular physical activity.

You may have seen what happens when a cast is removed from an arm or leg that had been broken. Lack of exercise made the limb smaller and weaker than the other one. After being used again for a few weeks, the arm or leg becomes larger and stronger. When muscles are used, they grow firm and strong. Muscles that are not used properly become flabby and weak. This can happen to all the muscles, including the heart muscle.

Our purpose in encouraging physical activity is not just to have family members with strong muscles. We are interested in healthy activities that keep muscles in good condition. Physical activity does much more than condition muscles. It also:

- Helps keep weight down, especially when fewer calories are eaten
- Helps bowels work better
- Helps you feel and look more alert
- Helps you have the energy to do more things
- Makes housework and other activities less tiring.

An important benefit of physical exercise is that it helps the heart and lungs work better. The heart pumps more blood with less effort when the heart muscle is in good condition. After heavy exercise, such as jogging or push-ups, the well-conditioned heart recovers quickly. Lungs expand more fully and take in more oxygen if a person gets enough exercise.

Easy physical exercise, such as brisk walking, gardening and bicycling, are safe for most people. Of course, people with special health problems—for instance, heart disease or back disorder—should ask their doctor about the kind and amount of exercise best for them. As a rule, middle-aged and older people should not engage in strenuous exercise if they are not used to it. Do not recommend sit-ups or other vigorous exercises. Encourage walking and other activities that are not too strenuous.

Those who have not been active should start with easy physical activity and increase it a little at a time. They may expect to see results overnight, but this will not happen. Help people to understand this so they will not be discouraged. Emphasize the importance of including physical activities in daily schedules. As little as 15 minutes a day is a good starter. The amount of time can be increased slowly to as long as the person wishes. Point out that they should not get overtired, however.

Help people to understand that it takes time, effort and determination to see and feel the benefits of increased exercise. Your encouragement and support will mean a great deal to them.

Let's Move It!

This information was adapted by Carla Shearer, Extension health education specialist, The Texas A&M University System, from materials prepared by the Illinois Cooperative Extension Service. The author appreciates the assistance of Zelda Williams, Lynne Thibodeaux and Elaine Ward, Extension program specialists—family resource development program, Prairie View A&M University, The Texas A&M University System, in the preparation of this publication.

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