

[IMAGE]

Good Vibrations: Fitness for the New Year

By Jasper Sidhu, BSc, DC

A new year brings new opportunities to improve your health and achieve the level of fitness you truly desire. What is your fitness goal? If you're like many, you want to get in shape fast without getting injured or burned out in the process. Here's a peek at one of the best ways to get fit and stay fit in 2009 and beyond.

A great deal of research suggests strength training is essential to prevent aging, increase function and decrease pain if you're suffering from illness. However, when it comes to doing it, a lack of commitment can be about more than the typical "I don't have time." For some of us, it may be that exercise itself causes pain, so we tend to avoid it. In other cases, we aren't able to participate in strength training due to physical limitations and disabilities. If any of these reasons applies to you, there may still be hope when it comes to staying in shape: vibration training.

Vibration exercise platforms are steadily increasing in popularity. The platforms promise to give you the same results in 15 minutes as would take one hour to achieve at the gym; sometimes without even changing into workout clothes. Does this sound too good to be true? Let's take a closer look at vibration training, including how it works, what kind of benefits it can provide and what to look for if you decide to try.

Vibration exercise may be something new to people here in North America, but it's been validated through 40 years of research in Russia and was originally used by the Russian space program and Olympic athletes. However, after the fall of Communism, the technology made its way to Europe, and then to North America. It's been shown to produce so many positive results that it's now being used by hospitals, rehabilitation centers and professional sports teams. It's also being integrated into chiropractic practices because chiropractic doctors understand the benefits vibration exercise provides for their patients.

At the Schisler Spine Centre in Windsor, Ontario, Dr. Craig Schisler has integrated vibration exercise into his spinal practice. "Most of my patients are unable to engage in conventional exercises, and I feel there needs to be a faster progression into an active program," says Dr. Schisler. "Vibration exercise not only achieves that, but the compliance rate (also) is quite high."

How Vibration Training Works

- Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Vibration training is an exercise option that caters to people who can't otherwise do conventional exercise due to pain or disability. Vibration exercise platforms work by simulating the body's natural stretch reflex, which creates an involuntary muscle contraction. In plain English, let's talk about what happens to your knee when your doctor taps it with a reflex hammer. The knee kicks out and will continue doing so every time the doctor taps it. This is something you can't control. Basically, the muscle is involuntarily contracting to the quick stretch brought on by the tap.

Now imagine yourself standing on a vibration platform in a comfortable, pain-free position. The platform will drop approximately 2-4 millimeters and can do that 20 to 50 times per second. In essence, instead of you moving up and down, the platform moves up and down. Every time it does that, it produces similar effects to getting your knee tapped by a reflex hammer. For example, in one minute, your thigh muscles can contract, involuntarily, up to 3,000 times!

Let Vibration Do the Work

Although getting a large amount of muscle contractions is important because it shortens the time it takes you to exercise, the real benefit is that you can actually make your workouts more intense and productive, not by going into painful range of motions, but by increasing the "intensity" of the vibration. If 35 muscle contractions per second is getting easy, increase it to 40 times per second. You can do this without putting additional undue stress on your joints. That's why vibration exercise is being used by everyone from professional athletes to the elderly, and it's why more and more health professionals are taking a serious look at providing this option to their patients. Not only are they getting results, but the research also seems to be supporting it.

According to Dr. Larry Leigh, assistant professor at the University of Windsor, "Initial research was primarily focused on sports performance, but now there's a considerable shift toward (whole-body vibration) applications as a therapeutic tool. Outcomes such as increased strength, flexibility, circulation and pain reduction are now being focused on for such conditions as arthritis, back pain, osteoporosis, multiple sclerosis and the geriatric population."

How Will It Benefit You?

Now that you have a good understanding of how vibration therapy and exercise work, the more important question is, how will it benefit you? Being able to have your muscles work at such a fast pace has many health and fitness benefits - here are just a few:

Positive effects on strength: There are really two ways to get stronger. One way is depicted in magazines and movies all the time. The media has shown us that the only way to get stronger is to get bigger muscles by lifting heavy weights. However, there is another way to get stronger. We don't use all of our muscles when we lift something or move. Therefore, the more muscles you use, the more you are able to lift or carry. Vibration exercise, because it is involuntary, helps you use more of your muscles. When you use more muscles, you are able to do more. It's that simple. This is especially important for the elderly, who often require good strength to be able to stay independent.

Positive effects on circulation: Gentle, rapid contractions allow the muscle to work as a pump, resulting in increased blood flow within the circulatory system. This allows the body to carry off waste products much faster, thereby enhancing circulation and recovery. This is very important for people with diabetes, for whom poor circulation is a serious consequence of their condition.

Positive effects on bone: Vibration therapy/exercise has a positive effect on bone. This is based upon Wolffe's law, which states that bone responds to the physical stresses put on it. Rapid muscular contractions with vibration will lead to increased strength and favorable stresses being placed on the bone.

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Dr. Karl Johnson, a chiropractor and clinical nutritionist from Michigan, has found considerable success with vibration therapy. One of his first patients to use this modality was a 51-year-old female diagnosed with osteoporosis. The patient decided not to take medication and wanted another solution. After four months of vibration exercise therapy, her medical doctor's before-and-after bone density tests showed a 1.9 percent increase in bone mass, and the original osteoporosis diagnosis was downgraded to osteopenia.

"Vibration exercise has allowed me to treat the whole person," said Dr. Johnson. "We all know that intense weight training has a positive effect on bone density, but most patients may not be able to or are unwilling to do it. Vibration exercise only takes 15 minutes, three times per week, and has allowed me to provide comparable exercise effects to my patients."

Less stress on joints: When we think of getting stronger, we always picture adding more and more weight to our bodies and then going through the exercise motions. However, what if you're limited by pain? With vibration therapy and exercise, because you are using only your own body weight, maximum joint comfort is produced.

Vibration therapy and exercise are rapidly gaining momentum as useful tools by health professionals, including chiropractors, to provide exercise benefits for patients who may otherwise be unable to do regular training, or who simply want faster results than can be achieved through conventional exercise. Because vibration exercise allows you to contract your muscles involuntarily, a large amount of contractions can occur in a short period of time, putting less stress on your joints and allowing you to get the same exercise effects in 15 to 20 minutes compared to one hour at the gym. With all the health and fitness benefits it provides, more and more people will be using it to get the benefits they want. Ask your doctor about vibration exercise and how it can help you.

Jasper Sidhu, DC, graduated from Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College in 1994 and opened the Downtown Injury Rehab Centre in Windsor, Ontario, incorporating vibration training into the rehabilitation part of his practice. He is vice president of clinical services for WAVE Manufacturing (www.wavexercise.com).

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