

[IMAGE]

An Education in Exercise

Get the Most Out of Your Workout

By Dr. Jasper Sidhu

Want to know the secret fountain of youth we all seem to be chasing, no matter our age? It's definitely not a new pill and much better than a complex diet that can be difficult to follow even for a short period of time. The closest thing to a fountain of youth is *exercise*.

Course Introduction

It's pretty simple: One of the leading causes of aging is lack of movement. A sedentary lifestyle is bad news at any age, but the good news is that you can reap the benefits of exercise at any age as well. In fact, evidence suggests regular exercise can "set back the clock" 20 years or more.

There's a great deal of misinformation out there regarding exercise, best demonstrated through an amusing story I heard awhile back. A 75-year-old patient goes to the doctor and asks what they can do about their right knee pain and arthritis. The doctor says, "There's not much you can do. It's just a natural part of aging." The patient looks at the doctor and says, "But my other leg is just as old and it doesn't hurt!"

Although this gets a laugh out of my patients, it clearly demonstrates that age should not be an excuse. Let's take a look at some of the benefits of exercise and the key points you should remember when starting an exercise program. Take these tips to heart, regardless of your age or the physical condition you may be dealing with, and you'll be better equipped to improve your health.

Education in Exercise - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark A significant amount of research that is beginning to show that a lot of the aches, pains and health problems we get between the ages of 30 and 70 are not due to a natural process of aging, but due to our sedentary lifestyles. A novel study done through the space program found that one month of complete bed rest was equal to an amazing 30 years of aging! Although none of us spend 24 hours a day in bed, it just goes to show you that the less activity you do, the more you age.

Exercise can do more than just delay the process and lead to better strength and flexibility; it also can have a significant impact on our brains. In one study, older adults who exercised three times a week had a 38 percent lower chance of developing Alzheimer's. And recent research also evaluated whether an exercise program actually increased pain due to arthritis. Researchers found that a training program consisting of intense stationary bicycling and vigorous strength training did not appear to produce joint symptoms in older adults. Their conclusion was that if there is any joint pain, one should look at other causes other than exercise.

Whether you're in good health, rehabbing a recent injury or have arthritis, osteoporosis or other chronic condition, the following key points should be followed to ensure you get the most out of your workout. Remember to talk to your doctor first so the two of you can work together to design an exercise program that's right for you.

Education in Exercise Lesson - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **LESSON 1** Before starting an exercise program, you and your health professional need to understand what your immediate goals are. Are you trying to lose weight? Increase strength? Train for a particular sport? Do you have any swelling? Pain? Weakness? Are your joints stiff? Once you know what you want to accomplish, it's a lot easier to figure out where to start. Research shows that immediate results usually motivate people to continue what they are doing. If your goal is to decrease joint stiffness through stretching, but decide to start with strengthening exercises that don't address the stiffness, you could lose motivation. If you're trying to lose weight, but don't do any fat-burning exercises, you won't get the results you want (certainly not in the time frame you want). Always remember to have short-term goals and work from there.

Education in Exercise Lesson - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **LESSON 2** Exercise should consist of three clear phases. Begins with five to 10 minutes of warm-ups. Keep in mind that a "warm-up" is *not* the same as stretching. Warming up means doing low-intensity range-of-motion exercises that increase body temperature. This increase in body temperature heats up the joints and muscle, preparing them to handle the rigors of exercise. Warm-ups can include such things as simply walking back and forth, moving the arms and legs in pain free ranges of motion, or a slow and steady ride on a bicycle. It's really just about getting your body moving and getting heat to your muscles.

The second phase is the exercise itself. It can be strengthening, aerobic training, strength training, etc. The third phase is a cooldown phase, which can include stretching since the muscles are warmed up enough to

be stretched. Never stretch a cold muscle. Research shows that overstretching in the beginning without a proper warm-up can actually cause further injury.

Education in Exercise Lesson - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **LESSON 3** Type of exercise is just as important as the three phases. Try to incorporate different types of programs, such as stretching, strength training, balance training, and aerobic conditioning. Each of these affects the joints and body in different ways. By using all of them, you'll be able to make better gains in your health.

Education in Exercise Lesson - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **LESSON 4** There can be some discomfort with exercise at first. Therefore, precaution should be taken to ensure you don't injure yourself. Remember that your body's response to exercise can change day by day. You shouldn't feel *pain*, particularly sudden/sharp pain, when you are exercising. If you do, you need to adjust the exercise, decrease intensity, find a more comfortable position, and/or discuss with your health professional. If pain lasts longer than one to two hours after exercise, or if there is swelling and weakness, then you may have overdone it. Ensure that you use ice after your workouts to decrease any swelling. By understanding that there may be some responses like this, you'll be more aware that you have to adjust your program rather than giving up altogether. This will increase the chances you continue your activities long term.

Education in Exercise Lesson - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **LESSON 5** In terms of stretching, pick a time of the day when you are generally less stiff or have less pain. (This is particularly important if you are rehabbing an injury or have a chronic joint condition like arthritis.) For some, this may be at the end of the day. Whatever time of the day, doing your stretching program when you have minimal pain or stiffness will provide motivation to continue and help prevent injury.

When stretching, make sure you hold the position for 10 to 30 seconds. Thirty seconds is optimal since it takes this long for the muscle to actually relax. To get better use out of your stretching, take a warm shower or apply moist heat to the area prior to stretching. And remember, don't stretch a cold muscle or you could injure yourself.

Education in Exercise Lesson - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **LESSON 6** Strengthening exercises are also important. However, strengthening doesn't only mean going to the gym and lifting heavy weights with all the body-builders. New research shows that high-repetition exercises with lower-weight loads can have the same effects on muscle strength as doing heavy lifting. This is great news for those who aren't inclined to keep adding weight to make strength gains.

Strengthening exercises can start with "isometric" exercises. This basically means you stay in one position during the exercise. For example, bending your knees slightly and holding that position is an excellent way to strengthen your thighs. If you can't go any lower, don't worry. Start with one position and then you will slowly be able to go further. Remember, it's about taking baby steps.

Strengthening exercises can progress from just using your own body weight at first. Most people have a tendency to add additional weight as soon as the exercise seems to get easier. Then pain sets in and they become discouraged. Always remember that it is better to increase the duration of the exercise rather than increasing the intensity (adding more weight). If you can do an exercise 15 times, don't try adding more weight. Simply do the exercise 20 times and so on. Your goal is to always increase duration so your body will not be stressed enough to cause any pain.

Education in Exercise Lesson - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **LESSON 7** Rest time is crucial for strength training. In the past, people tended to weight train every day. Research is showing that if a body doesn't get enough rest, it will break down instead of building up. Therefore, never strength train the same body part two days in a row. Always allow at least two days in between, if not longer.

Education in Exercise Lesson - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **LESSON 8** Lifestyle activities are also effective forms of exercise. For example, gardening, going for hikes, taking the stairs at work, or playing catch with your kids or grandkids is just as effective in producing positive effects as a more traditional "gym" program. The misconception is that we need to set aside time to exercise, when in fact it's something you can incorporate into everyday activities. Find things you enjoy doing, and make them a regular part of your day.

Education in Exercise Lesson - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Education in Exercise dummy - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **LESSON 9** Don't overlook aerobic activities, which are important in maintaining heart health and have many positive health benefits. Again, you need to find activities you enjoy. The more you enjoy something, the more likely you will continue doing it over time. There are a wide variety of aerobic activities to choose from, such as bicycling, swimming, walking, dance, *tai chi*, treadmills, etc. Also, things like walking the dog, raking leaves, and playing golf are also considered aerobic activities.

Education in Exercise Lesson - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **LESSON 10** Most guidelines recommend 20 to 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per day. However, if you are not able to do this, then break it up into five-minute bouts several times a day. Research shows that doing smaller bouts of exercise through the day is just as beneficial as one continuous session. I have to admit that I get bored going to the gym and doing something for 30 minutes straight. Therefore, I take four or five breaks throughout the day and do something for five minutes, such as walking the stairs, moving around the office, etc. Remember, it's about doing something instead of nothing.

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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