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Authors:

Cabe, Delia

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10 REASONS TO Move

Exercise makes you sharper, happier, and healthier. Get ready to transform your life!

Have you ever vowed to ring in a new year by starting to exercise — only to end up too busy, tired, or achy? The right motivation can make you 70% more likely to keep it up for the long haul, reports the American College of Sports Medicine. But focusing only on weight loss can cut your odds of success by over half, say researchers. A better inspiration: the amazing health rewards you get by being active. A stronger heart and lower cancer risk are two well-known benefits. Here, more that are guaranteed to motivate.

1 Improve Language Skills

A single treadmill session can make you brainier. Exercisers who ran just two 3-minute sprints, with a 2-minute break in between, learned new words 20% faster than those who rested, in a University of Muenster in Germany study. Getting your heart pumping increases blood flow, delivering more oxygen to your noggin. It also spurs new growth in the areas of the brain that control multitasking, planning, and memory.

Do this ▶ Add about of exercise, like running up and down the stairs, before trying to memorize anything — say, Spanish phrases for your trip to Mexico.

2 Get All-Natural Pain Relief

It may seem counterintuitive, but rest isn't necessarily best for reducing pain and stiffness in the knees, shoulders, back, or neck. Healthy adults who did aerobic activity consistently had 25% less musculoskeletal pain than their couch-bound peers, says

Stanford senior research scientist Bonnie Bruce, DrPH, MPH, RD. Exercise releases endorphins, the body's natural pain reliever, and may make you less vulnerable to tiny tears in muscles and tendons.

Staying active can also provide relief for chronic conditions such as arthritis: In a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill study, arthritis sufferers experienced 25% less pain and 16% less stiffness after 6 months of low-impact exercise like balance and strengthening moves. Most people start to feel improvement within a few weeks, says study author Leigh Callahan, PhD, an associate professor of medicine at UNC.

Do this ▶ Practice yoga or tai chi twice a week; both increase flexibility and range of motion and reduce pain.

3 Be Happier at Work

An active lifestyle may help you check off extra items on your to-do list, says a study from the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom. On days staffers participated in on-site fitness activities, they reported thinking more clearly, getting more done, and interacting more effectively with colleagues.

You'll be less likely to miss work due to illness, too. Research shows that people who participate in vigorous leisure-time physical activity (such as jogging or bicycling) just once or twice a week take about half the sick time of those who are more sedentary.

Do this ▶ Sign up for workplace fitness classes. None on-site? Ask HR to designate a room for a noontime yoga session, using DVD or videotape instruction. Or recruit coworkers to go for a lunch hour power walk.

4 Feel Sexy at Any Size

A good workout practically ensures a better body image. A Pennsylvania State University study found that women ages 42 to 58 felt more attractive after 4 months of walking or yoga even if they didn't lose weight.

Exercise can also put you in the mood for love by increasing blood flow to the genitals. University of Washington research found that just one 20-minute cycling workout enhanced sexual arousal up to 169% in women. And the benefits stand the test of time: A Harvard study of swimmers found that those over age 60 were as satisfied sexually as those decades younger.

Do this ▶ Try 20 minutes of aerobics before a romantic evening. To feel good naked anytime, walk or do yoga daily.

5 Lower Dental Bills

Flossing and brushing, it turns out, are not the only keys to a healthy smile, says Mohammad Al-Zahrani, DDS, PhD, a former associate professor at Case Western Reserve University. Exercise plays an important role, too. In his recent study, Al-Zahrani discovered that adults who did 30 minutes of moderate activity 5 or more times a week

were 42% less likely to suffer from periodontitis, a gum disease that's more common as you get older. Working out may thwart periodontitis the same way it does heart disease — by lowering levels of inflammation-causing C-reactive protein in the blood.

Do this ▶ In addition to staying active, get a twice-yearly dental cleaning (or more often if your dentist says you are at high risk for gum disease).

6 Slash Cold Risk 33%

Moderate exercise doesn't just rev your metabolism — it boosts your immune system, too, helping your body fight off cold bugs and other germs. Women ages 50 to 75 who did 45 minutes of cardio, 5 days a week, had a third as many colds as those who did once-weekly stretching sessions, a University of Washington study found.

Do this ▶ Stay active, but don't overdo it. More than 90 minutes of vigorous exercise, such as running, most days may actually reduce immunity.

7 Reach the Deep-Sleep Zone

Say good night to poor sleep. Women age 60 and older who walked or danced for at least an hour, four times a week, woke up half as often and slept an average 48 minutes more a night than sedentary women, according to a study in the journal *Sleep Medicine*. That is good news for the many women who toss and turn more as they get older. As you age, sleep patterns start shifting, so you spend more of the night in lighter sleep phases, says Shawn Youngstedt, PhD, an assistant professor of exercise science at the University of South Carolina.

Do this ▶ Aim to exercise for at least half an hour, even if it's after a long day. Evidence suggests that for most people, light to moderate activity in the evening won't disturb sleep, though trial and error will tell you what works for you.

8 Beat Bloating

The next time you feel puffy around the middle, resist the urge to stay put. A study from Spain's Autonomous University of Barcelona suggests that mild physical activity clears gas and alleviates bloating. That's because increasing your heart rate and breathing stimulates the natural contractions of the intestinal muscles, helping to prevent constipation and gas buildup by expediting digestion.

Do this ▶ Walk or pedal lightly on a bike until you feel better.

9 See Clearly

What's good for your heart is good for your eyes. An active lifestyle can cut your risk of age-related macular degeneration by up to 70%, according to a *British Journal of Ophthalmology* study of 4,000 adults. This incurable disease makes reading, driving, and seeing fine details difficult, and it's the most common cause of blindness after age 60.

Do this ▶ Keep active by walking at least 12 blocks (about a mile) a day, and wear UVA/UVB-blocking sunglasses during outdoor activities all year long.

10 Enjoy Instant Energy

If you're among the 50% of adults who report feeling tired at least 1 day a week, skip the java and go for a walk. University of Georgia researchers who analyzed 70 different studies concluded that moving your body increases energy and reduces fatigue. Regular exercise boosts certain fatigue-fighting brain chemicals such as norepinephrine and dopamine, which pep you up, and serotonin, a mood enhancer.

Do this ▶ Take a 20-minute stroll for a quick pick-me-up, or aim for 40 minutes of activity daily for a sustained lift.