

Physical Fitness

Pursuing physical fitness throughout your life is an essential element in maintaining a healthy level of physical and emotional well-being. There are many different types of physical fitness, and all of them affect your body differently and promote various results in your body that help you stay fit/healthy. Physical fitness not only helps people look better, but aids them in every day activities and makes people FEEL better too!

Now, some people could ask, “What exactly is physical fitness?” and there are actually several answers to that. Physical fitness is “a person’s ability to function efficiently and effectively without injury, to resist disease and to exceed in the total/main areas of fitness.” Physical fitness is essential to someone who wants to stay healthy and be able to enjoy life to the fullest, because without it, many things could go wrong. This leads people who are physically fit to not only be “strong” or “flexible”, but succeed in every component area of fitness.

One component of physical fitness is aerobic or cardiovascular fitness. “Any physical activity that requires an increased intake of oxygen is an aerobic exercise.” Yet, it can also be defined as “endurance or the ability to sustain work for a prolonged period of time.” The importance of aerobic fitness has many variables. For example, it mainly helps with the overall health of a person’s body. If a man or woman does not exceed to the amount of aerobic or cardiovascular exercise needed, that person could be in a load of trouble. Suppose that someone has suffered a heart attack in the past year, cardiovascular exercises (performed under supervision and being performed properly) could reduce some factors that may cause that same thing to occur again. So, one can see why aerobic fitness is important in some aspect. Another way it is important is that

cardiovascular/aerobic exercise aids in reducing or sometimes improving things that can help with someone's health in their body. Lowering blood pressure, increasing blood flow, assisting in weight control (reducing body fat), etc. which is very important to one's health. Aerobic fitness improves all of these components and has a great effect upon a person's health. Not just physical, emotional components are integrated as well. Good aerobic exercise can help in various different ways. For example, it helps people sleep better at night, reduces anxiety and stress and reduces the chance of being diagnosed with depression or obesity. Now, someone who is not diagnosed with one of these things could most likely imagine what emotional stress and burden this could take on someone. Yet, if a person takes precautions and does cardiovascular exercise on a weekly basis, this all can be avoided! Although only doing the exercises a few times will not give people the affect some could be looking for. It is important to maintain a good and steady work out regimen, if someone is looking to get results. Maintaining at an average or high level of fitness is essential because without this, some problems may occur as I already mentioned (high blood pressure, heart attack, etc.). To improve in aerobic or cardiovascular fitness doing some simple, yet fun, exercises can help. Biking, swimming, hiking, etc. can all help with your cardiovascular fitness, as well as the old-fashioned jog around the track. Although, to get results and notice a change in your habits, it is advised that a person does 30-60 minutes of aerobic/cardiovascular exercise 3 to 4 times a week. In my opinion, cardiovascular fitness is very useful. In sports, if you are not fit, that takes the fun and competitiveness out of the game! If you can't run up and down the court, what fun is that in basketball? It is best to be physically fit and have improved cardiovascular endurance and training for your own health, and the good of any activities you do!

Another component of physical fitness is muscular strength and muscular endurance. Muscular endurance is defined by being “the ability to hold a specific position for a prolonged period of time or to repeat a specific movement many times with no or little breaks in between.” Although muscular strength is defined as: “the ability to exert a maximum force (like a doing one repetition on the bench press with as much weight as possible).” Muscular strength/endurance is important because it prevents fatigue and the stronger the muscles in the body are, the more calories will be burned at rest. So, if a person is physically strong and muscularly endured, then this would gain the importance in that person’s physical and emotional health. The importance of maintaining muscular fitness is that it aids in the long-run of people’s lives. Having muscular endurance and strength can help a 65-85 year old, believe it or not. If that individual at a younger age had good habits and fitness levels, then when he/she aged, it would be much easier to walk up stairs and do other daily activities. The muscular fitness of that individual would be such a big help in the components of the body, that even as they aged, the body would still in-habit and flourish from previous muscular fitness levels. Also, there is an emotional component to muscular fitness. Say that you are muscular fit; you look great, feel great, and can bench press a weight that exceeds your own body weight by a good margin. Would you say in that perspective that you would act better as a person and be more focused and pushed to do things? I think so! Although, if you were obese, and could not bench press the bar, how would you feel? Not nearly as good, most likely. The point here is that muscular endurance and strength aids in overall confidence of a person and helps them decide to stay more active, because they can do more things. If you’re fit, you are more apt to stay active and go hiking, weight-lifting, biking, etc. which would further

improve your fitness level (not only muscular) and make you feel great! This emotional concept of muscular fitness makes it another reason to get in good shape. Although, a lack of the amount of muscular fitness a person does could eventually take a person and their body into a cement wall. This wall could be obesity, muscular atrophy, or a lower age at which a person dies. And with these things comes emotional stress or worse, depression. So, as you can see, not participating correctly in muscular strength or endurance training can ultimately result in a collapse in your body and emotions. To avoid these things and to improve your muscular fitness level in endurance, running on a treadmill (or outdoors), rowing machines as well as many others, and skipping rope are just some of exercises available. To increase muscular strength, weight-lifting in general, pushups, crunches, leg raises, squats, barbell curls, etc. can all aid in improving someone's muscular strength. Doing all of these exercises for 60 minutes or less (depending on the exercises someone does) 3-5 times a week can produce good results and change someone's overall muscular fitness. Again, I have to add that in order to enjoy sports or any other physical activity you have to be physically fit in this area. Without it, playing sports, doing activities or life in general could be tough and put more stress than someone needs upon themselves.

There is also another component of physical fitness, flexibility. Flexibility is "the ability of your joints to move through a full range of motion." Having flexibility helps your body in a number of ways. One, being flexible allows more movement around your joints throughout your body. This can help in reducing the chance of injury and overall, help your body feel and perform better doing specific things that relate to flexibility/physical fitness. These components of flexibility are key and important in the

area of fitness. Flexibility also is important because it increases blood supply and nutrients to joint structures which can aid in circulation. This in turn, makes your tissue more “elastic” and helps your body cope with multiple stresses acted on your body/muscles. Also, many people feel that yoga or stretching is a calming activity. This has emotional importance and causes a reduction of stress on the person, helping with their health. If a person lacks flexibility all of these important aspects of the component of fitness will turn against them. If you are an athlete, and lack flexibility, you can be prone to injury and not perform as well as a flexible athlete could. This could take a number of different affects on your body and cause you to have a lack of success in your sports. Also, if joints are not susceptible to movement and flexibility, this can cause a huge difference in body feeling/control. Your joints/muscles could feel tight and be very tender to certain movements. This can cause a downward spiral in overall health, because if you don’t feel healthy enough to participate in activities, you will not exercise. The emotional benefit of flexibility exercise, if lost, could also defer a stress reliever and cause stresses to be acted upon your emotions and life. Although, some exercises can be performed to increase flexibility. Simple stretching exercises can be performed (hamstring, hip/glute, calf, quad, etc.) that help increase flexibility. Also, yoga is said to be a great exercise for flexibility (and strength). Various things are performed during a yoga session and it is a calming time, meant for emotional stress to be thrown away, and a peace at mind to be brought to your body. Stretching should be performed before, and after a workout (cool-down) and stretches are usually held between 15-30 seconds, repeating each stretch 2-3 times. If someone stretches within these guidelines and works out weekly, significant improvement will be seen. I must also say, that being an athlete

and flexibility come hand-in-hand. I may not be the most flexible guy in the world, but I can safely say, that at my stage, it helps significantly with sports and life in general. Things become easier to do and your body feels less sore and at ease more and more often. Stretching before games/practices should be taken seriously to avoid injury and it actually is a big part of being an athlete and being at a good stage of being physically and emotionally fit.

One of the final components of physical fitness is body composition. Body composition is “the proportion of fat and fat-free mass in the body.” Body composition is important because it basically makes your life better. If a person has a better body composition, that person is subdue and prone to being healthier, happier, and having a “better quality of life.” Even though, I must say, I think that someone’s “quality of life” is not measured by how fit someone is, but how that person feels and how much they are cared for, and care about others. Yet, I must also add, that being fit can increase the chances that you’re happier and enjoy life more. But, as mentioned before, body composition is basically related to a persons overall health and if they are healthy or not. A benefit of having a good body composition is that if someone does, they are more apt to participate in many things and feel better about themselves. This gives an emotional side to the component as well. Body composition is not only good for your body, but it’s also good for your mind! Although, if a person lacks an ideal body composition, this can create a pandemic. Obesity could be one of those problems. Your body composition being low (bad), means that you have a high fat content in your body. This could cause what I mentioned before, obesity. Now, I think we all know what obesity is and can lead to. Being “fat” and out of shape cause a huge amount of problems physically and

emotionally. These problems include lack of exercise, stress, depression, etc. To improve your body composition, basic exercise and drive to do well for yourself is needed. Your BMI is a component of your body composition, and you basically need to workout and continue to stay in shape to improve your BMI/overall health. Some examples of how to do so are mentioned in previous paragraphs above (weight-lifting, swimming, hiking, biking, yoga, etc.). To see improvement in body composition, one needs to exercise on a regular basis and EAT well. Body composition is not only about working out. Nutrition plays a role as well. Eating healthy and getting the recommended servings of each food group is necessary for a good body composition. Also, high amounts of protein are good because they help build muscle, which is good! Again, I must express my opinion on this specific topic and say, that I have never really thought about body composition that much. It doesn't occur to most people I don't think. All they think about (as I do mostly) is solely working out and becoming fit. Yet, normal people don't measure fitness in BMI or anything else associated with body composition, they hop on a scale and if they don't like the number they see, they go work out more and more until they see the number they want. This poses a problem in modern-day activities I think. People need to realize that how fit you are, is not based on weight at all! It is based on how you perform in certain activities based on YOUR specific body type and through good habits; an increase can be seen in overall health.

Some people may not have the time or most likely place/equipment to work out, though. This leads to several local opportunities in the area. Planet fitness, Eastlake Recreation Club, PILATES Ithaca, Finger Lakes Fitness Center, Ithaca YMCA, etc. are all local facilities around the Ithaca area that allow a chance for people to take advantage

of becoming fit. Some of these facilities memberships can be quite expensive on today's standards, but for the most part, are pretty good deals. For example, Planet Fitness offers a special membership deal going on right now, "\$20 down, 10\$ a month" for a membership to the facility. Yet, the equipment in this facility probably costs a fortune. Exercise equipment is mighty expensive (I know I've tried buying some!) and can be a pain to get a hold of, for a good price (barbells, push-up bars, treadmill, etc.). These facilities usually use much more advanced equipment though. This equipments price range goes into the thousands of dollars sometimes. Yet, you don't pay for it if you use these facilities, the owners do! So, the membership is the only cost at your feet.

Being healthy and having a good grip on physical fitness is essential to life as we know it. Without good health and the components to it, life would not be as it stands today. This is why all these things are so important and without the up-hold and push for success in the area of fitness physical and emotional burdens could be acknowledged. Fitness and everything associated with it is very important and should be taken seriously.