

The Mind/Body Connection: Introduction and Safe Exercise Practice for Adults

The Mind/Body Connection: What Does It Mean For You?

Your body responds to the way you think, feel and act. This is the “mind/body connection.”

- Individuals with good emotional health are aware of their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. They have learned healthy ways to cope with the stress and problems that are a normal part of life.
- People who are always stressed, anxious and/or upset may not have learned how to handle some of the stresses in life. They may begin feeling ill and even may have physical symptoms such as muscle spasms or ulcers. These changes could be the body trying to tell them that something is not right.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

- Mind/body medicine is a type of complementary alternative medicine. Mind/body practices focus on the interactions among the mind, body and behavior. The intent is to use the mind to affect physical well-being and health.
- Mind/body practices include meditation, yoga, acupuncture, deep-breathing exercises, hypnotherapy, progressive relaxation and Tai Chi.

This publication is part of a series on **The Mind/Body Connection**.

Other publications in this series are:

HSW-AP.004 The Mind/Body Connection: Deep Breathing and Simple Meditation

HSW-AP.005 The Mind/Body Connection: Basic Standing and Seated Stretching Exercises

HSW-AP.006 The Mind/Body Connection: Beginner Level Balance and Standing Stretches

ACTIVITY: DEEP BREATHING

Try this simple breath awareness exercise

1. Place your hands on your stomach and take a deep breath in, filling your diaphragm.
2. Feel your hands move out as you fully breathe.
3. Exhale and feel your hands return to the rest position.
4. Start with 3 to 5 breaths and increase to 8 to 12 breaths as you progress.

Benefits of Physical Activity

- Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of many chronic health conditions.
- Most health benefits occur with at least 30 minutes, 5 days a week of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. Additional benefits occur with additional physical activity.
- Both aerobic (endurance) and muscle-strengthening (resistance) physical activity are beneficial.
- The health benefits of physical activity also apply to people with disabilities.
- The benefits of physical activity usually far outweigh the possibility of negative outcomes.

- Physical activity can help with prevention of weight gain, weight loss, improved heart, lung and muscular fitness, fall prevention, reduced depression, clear thinking, and lessened anxiety.

Physical Activity Guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

All adults should be active. For good health adults should do **at least**:

- 30 minutes, 5 days a week of moderate-intensity exercise. What is moderate-intensity exercise? If you can carry on a conversation normally during an exercise activity, it is considered moderate intensity (walking, light bicycling, light jogging).

OR

- 20 minutes, 4 days a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity. What is vigorous-intensity exercise? If during exercise you can say only a few words before needing to take a breath, you are exercising at vigorous intensity. (running, swimming laps, aerobics)

OR

- a combination of moderate and vigorous intensity aerobic activities.

The American College of Sports Medicine suggests that adults should include flexibility exercises in their regular exercise. Stretching may help develop and maintain range of motion in the body's joints. ACSM also suggests that adults should stretch 2 to 3 days a week.

Stretching Safely: Tips from the National Institute on Aging

- Stretching should not be painful. If while moving into a stretch you feel pain, you are stretching too far. Ease up from the stretch so that it no longer hurts.
- Mild discomfort or a mild pulling feeling is normal.
- Slowly stretch into the desired position, as far as possible without pain, and hold the stretch for 10 to 30 seconds while you breathe. Relax, then repeat, trying to stretch farther.
- Remember to BREATHE. Do not hold your breath in a stretch.
- If you have had a hip replacement, check with your doctor before doing any lower body exercises, including stretches.

For more information and tips about exercise, visit the National Institute on Aging at <http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/ExerciseGuide/>.

Getting Started Safely, with Regular Exercise

- People who exercise less than 30 minutes a day 5 days a week, are considered inactive.
- Regular exercise practice can help you to control stress in your daily life.
- If you want to become more active, you can start safely with a regular walking routine.
- Walk slowly for 5 minutes several times each day, 5 to 6 days a week.
- When it gets easier to walk for 5 minutes at a time, increase the length of time that you walk to 10 minutes per session, 3 times a day.
- Slowly increase the walking speed, as the walking sessions become longer and easier for you.
- Exercise during daylight hours. If you must exercise at night, wear reflective clothing.

Safe Exercise for Older Adults

Older adults can gain real health benefits with a moderate amount of daily physical activity. Most older adults can safely get moderate exercise from activities such as walking or swimming. Consult with a member of your health care team to develop an exercise routine that will be safe for you.

Risk of falling is a concern for older adults. Consider practicing exercises that maintain and improve balance, which include the following exercise:

ACTIVITY: TOE STANDS (HEEL RAISES)

1. Stand behind a sturdy chair.
2. Use the chair for support.
3. Place your feet about shoulder width apart and lift up your heels, rising up on to your toes.
4. Pause, then return your heels to the floor. Repeat 5 to 10 times.
5. To increase the challenge repeat 5 more times or practice on one foot.

Safe Exercise for Adults with Chronic Medical Conditions

- People with a chronic disease should be under the regular care of a medical professional. In consultation with your health care provider, you can develop a physical activity plan that is appropriate for you. Talk with your doctor, nurse practitioner or physical therapist about safely starting an exercise safely from your programs.
- Osteoarthritis: If you have osteoarthritis you should do activities that are low impact, not painful, and have low risk of joint injury. Swimming, walking and strength training are good examples.
- Type II Diabetes: Physical activity has positive benefits in people with diabetes. If you have diabetes you must monitor your blood glucose **both before and after exercise** and avoid injury to your feet.
- Cancer survivors: Physically active adults with breast or colon cancer are less likely to die prematurely or have a recurrence of the cancer. **Physical activity can help** to reduce negative side effects of cancer treatment. If you are a cancer survivor you should ask your health-care provider to match your physical activity plan to your abilities and health status.

Safe Exercise for Adults with Disabilities

- Regular physical activity provides important health benefits for people with disabilities. The benefits include improved: circulation, muscle fitness, mental health, and better ability to do tasks of daily life.
- Some people with disabilities are not able to follow the guidelines for adults. You should adapt your physical activity program to match your abilities, in consultation with your health-care provider.

Safe Exercise for Women During and After Pregnancy

- If you are pregnant or have just had a baby you should be under the regular care of a health-care provider. Moderate-intensity physical activity is generally safe for women with uncomplicated pregnancies.
- After the first trimester of pregnancy, talk with your doctor before doing exercise activities that involve lying on your back, or contact and high-impact activities such as horseback riding, soccer, basketball, and downhill skiing.

Safe Exercise in Hot Weather

- Exercise in the cool of early morning or evening.

- Switch to indoor activities (walking inside the mall or department store instead of in the neighborhood).
- Change the type of activity (swimming rather than walking).
- Lower the intensity of activity (walking rather than jogging).
- Stop to rest in the shade a few times while exercising.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise. If your urine is bright to dark yellow, start drinking water 2 to 3 hours prior to exercise.
- Wear comfortable clothing that moves moisture out, away from the skin. Avoid cotton fabrics, as they tend to hold moisture.
- Use sunscreen and reapply after excessive sweating or rubbing.

Safe Exercise in Cold Weather

- The most common cold weather exercise illnesses include hypothermia, exhaustion, and dehydration.
- To reduce heat loss, stay dry. Wear several light layers of loose clothing that insulate the skin with trapped air. Wear clothing that moves moisture away from the skin. Cotton is not ideal as it holds moisture in. Wear a rain and wind proof coat that has built-in ventilation.
- Cover the head, neck, legs and hands, the areas of the body that lose large amounts of heat.
- In cold weather, muscles are more stiff and prone to injury. Warm up using all major muscle groups for 5 to 10 minutes before your exercise routine. Cool down for 5 to 10 minutes at the end of the exercise session.

Symptoms of dehydration can include:

- Dry mouth and skin
- Lack of urination or urine that is darkly colored
- Headache
- Tiredness or lack of energy
- Dizziness
- Thirst

Additional Resources:

- Health Education through Extension Leadership. (2005). *Downloadable physical activity exhibit*. University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service. Retrieved on January 29, 2011 from <http://www.ca.uky.edu/HES/index.php?p=259>
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