

## **Physical Activity, Fitness and Health**

**Yogendra.Shivajirao Patil** Asst Prof.

(Director of Physical Education and Sports)

LBRD Arts & Commerce Mahila Mahavidyalaya Nashik Road.

### **Introduction**

#### **Health**

Health is a state of total mental, physical and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease. Mental health and emotional health are very broad subjects with various categories and sub-categories that cover emotional, psychological, intellectual aspects as well as bordering into spiritual health and wellness etc.

#### **Physical Fitness**

Physical fitness is to the human body what fine tuning is to an engine. It enables us to perform up to our potential. Fitness it is "The ability to perform daily tasks vigorously and alertly, with energy left over for enjoying leisure-time activities and meeting emergency demands. Physical fitness involves the performance of the heart and lungs, and the muscles of the body.. It is influenced by age, sex, heredity, personal habits, exercise and eating practices. Physical fitness is essential for good health and the best way to protect you from infections and stay healthy is through diet and exercise

#### **Physical activities as lifetime activities**

**Physical fitness** comprises two related concepts: **General fitness** (a state of health and well-being) and **Specific fitness** (a task-oriented definition based on the ability to perform specific aspects of sports or occupations). Physical fitness is generally achieved through exercise, correct nutrition and enough rest. In previous years, fitness was commonly defined as the capacity to carry out the day's activities without undue fatigue. These days, physical fitness is considered a measure of the body's ability to function efficiently and effectively in work and leisure activities, to be healthy, to resist hypokinetic diseases and to meet emergency situations. Physical fitness program must address the following essentials: Cardiovascular endurance Flexibility.

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for developing coronary artery disease. Coronary artery disease is characterized by deposits of fatty substances, cholesterol, calcium and other substances in the inner lining of arteries that apply blood to the heart muscle. It also contributes to other risk factors, including obesity, high blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes. Even moderately intense physical activity such as brisk walking is beneficial when done regularly for a total of 30 minutes or longer on most or all days.

#### **Why is exercise or physical activity important?**

Regular aerobic physical activity increases your fitness level and capacity for exercise. Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke and is linked to cardiovascular mortality. Regular physical activity can help control blood lipid abnormalities, diabetes and obesity. Aerobic physical activity can also help reduce blood pressure. The people who modify their behavior and start regular physical activity after heart attack have better rates of survival and better quality of life. Healthy people as well as many patients with cardiovascular disease can improve their fitness and exercise performance with training.

#### **How can physical activity help condition?**

- Some activities improve flexibility, some build muscular strength and some increase endurance.
- Some forms of continuous activities involve using the large muscles in your arms or legs. These are called endurance or aerobic exercises. They help the heart by making it work more efficiently during exercise and at rest.

- Brisk walking, jumping rope, jogging, bicycling, cross-country skiing and dancing are examples of aerobic activities that increase endurance.

### **How can we improve our physical fitness?**

Programs designed to improve physical fitness take into account frequency (how often), intensity (how hard), and time (how long). They provide the best conditioning.

#### **These activities are especially beneficial when done regularly:**

- brisk walking, hiking, stair-climbing, aerobic exercise
- jogging, running, bicycling, rowing and swimming
- activities such as soccer and basketball that include continuous running

#### **Moderate-intensity activities**

Even moderate-intensity activities, when performed daily, can have some long-term health benefits.

They help lower the risk of cardiovascular diseases. Here are some examples:

- walking for pleasure, gardening and yard work
- housework, dancing and prescribed home exercise
- recreational activities such as tennis, racquetball, soccer, basketball and touch football

Regular physical activity can also help reduce or eliminate some of these risk factors:

- **High blood pressure** — Regular aerobic activities can lower blood pressure.
- **Cigarette smoking** — Smokers who become physically active are more likely to cut down or stop smoking.
- **Diabetes** — People at their ideal weight are less likely to develop diabetes. Physical activity may also decrease insulin requirements for people with diabetes.
- **Obesity and overweight** -Regular physical activity can help people lose excess fat or stay at a reasonable weight.

#### **Benefits of physical activity**

- Physical activity builds healthy bones, muscles and joints, and reduces the risk of colon cancer. Millions of Americans suffer from illnesses that can be prevented or improved through regular physical activity.
- Physical activity also helps psychologically. It reduces feelings of depression and anxiety, improves mood and promotes a sense of well-being.

#### **Lifetime Fitness Activities**

Some fitness activities may be easy to start while you're a kid, but harder to maintain as an adult. Team sports are a perfect example of this. This is why it's important to focus on learning and participating in activities that are easier to maintain over the course of your life. The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports defines lifetime activities as those "that may be readily carried into adulthood because they generally need only one or two people." These types of activities are highly varied, so try several until you find the one that meets your needs.

#### **Lifetime Fitness Concepts**

To maintain fitness for a lifetime, you should include a variety of activities and food to allow for a well rounded regimen. Your exercise should include cardiovascular, strength and flexibility training. Healthy food choices should follow the daily food guidelines, allowing you to get the necessary nutrition to function at your optimal level.

#### **Cardiovascular**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that, "children get 60 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercise at least three times a week, and that adults get at least two and a half hours

each week." Cardiovascular activities are those that increase your heart and breath rates. Activities such as running, biking, brisk walking are considered aerobic activity. Anaerobic conditioning, short bursts of activity lasting 30 seconds to two minutes, should be included for overall health cardiovascular health. Cardiovascular fitness increases your general well being, while decreasing a variety of risk factors for disease.

### **Strength**

Muscle strengthening has a variety of benefits. Adequate strength levels allow you to accomplish daily living and fun activities. Increased muscle increases metabolism which helps in weight control. Weight training also will decrease your risk of osteoporosis. The recommended amount for children is some type of strengthening activities, which can include pushups, pull ups, and swinging on the jungle gym, at least three times a week. Adults should work each large muscle group at least twice a week.

### **Flexibility**

Flexibility is your ability to move your body through ranges of joint motions. It is considered to be one of the five components of fitness by the American Council on Exercise. Maintaining flexibility through each joint allows you the ability to use joints through their full range of motion. Adding activities that promote movement will increase your flexibility and range of motion. Tennis is an activity that inherently promotes a wide variety of joint movements, while yoga specifically addresses flexibility through sustained moves. Flexibility is necessary to perform some of the most basic aspects of daily living. For example, you may experience difficulty with putting on your shoes and socks if you do not have adequate flexibility in your back and hips.

### **Body Composition**

Body composition is the percentage of body fat, bone and muscle in the body. This is the single most accurate indicator of fitness available. There are a number of ways to determine body composition. The most common assessment of healthy weight is the Body Mass Indicator or BMI. This does not calculate the percentage of body fat, but gives a general assessment of body weight, which indicates if further testing may be necessary.

### **Nutrition.**

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Americans eat more than they need and yet still don't get adequate nutrition. Choosing nutrient rich foods that are not high in calories is vital. Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, and lean protein, and avoiding saturated and Trans fats, will help you to maintain your overall fitness goals. Highly processed foods are quickly turned into sugars in your system. Nutrients are lost during processing and are often more calorie dense.

Body Weight and Composition Body weight and composition simply refer to an individual's weight in terms of percentage of muscle, bone and fat tissue. Obtaining these measurements can accurately predict one's risk for developing cardiovascular disease. "Advanced Fitness Assessment and Exercise Prescription" says excess fat stored around the abdomen is considered a risk factor for developing serious cardiovascular, pulmonary and metabolic diseases. Maintaining a healthy body weight is key to living a healthy, longer life.

### **Conclusions**

The observation from above that Health is a state of total mental, physical and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease. Mental health and emotional health are very broad subjects with various categories and sub-categories that cover emotional, psychological, intellectual aspects as well as bordering into spiritual health and wellness. Physical activity builds healthy bones, muscles and joints, and reduces the risk of colon cancer. Millions of Americans suffer from illnesses that can be prevented or improved through regular physical activity. Physical activity also helps psychologically. It reduces feelings of depression and anxiety, improves mood and promotes a sense of well-being.

### References

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