BE WELL

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The UConn Buzz

THE UNEXPECTED BENEFIT OF EXERCISE

As many as 50 million Americans are living sedentary lives, putting them at increased risk of health problems and even early death, a leading expert in exercise science told the American Psychological Association today.

Nationwide, we spend more than half of our waking hours sitting or inactive for long stretches of time—at work, at school, in the car or watching TV or another type of screen.

Scientists estimate that Americans ages 12 and up now spend about 8 to 10 hours a day sitting and doing things that require little energy. The groups who sit the most are teens and older adults.

Studies have found that any time you get up and move, you're improving your chances for good health.

"Some of us are sort of forced into sedentary lifestyles by our jobs, by school or by commuting," says Dr. Donna Spruijt-Metz, who studies childhood obesity at the University of Southern California. "But research suggests that breaking up sedentary time with even short bouts of activity—like getting up from your desk and moving around—is associated with smaller waist circumference and other indictors of good health."

When you're upright and active, even briefly, your body is at work. "You're engaging a wide range of systems in your body when you move throughout your day," says Dr. Charles E. Matthews, who studies physical activity and cancer risk at NIH. "Your muscles are contracting, you're maintaining your balance, and you're resisting the force of gravity."

When you're sitting, Matthews says, "muscle contractions go way down, and your body's resistance to gravity decreases." When you sit for long periods, your body adapts to the reduced physical demand and slows down its metabolism. When metabolism slows, you burn fewer calories and boost the chance that extra energy will be stored as fat.

But exercise has many more benefits to your health and wellbeing.

Studies indicate that a exercise and yoga can help in treating depression and anxiety, and managing stress.

One study, lends further support to the spillover benefits of exercise. A team of researchers compared the performance of 11 professional cyclists and 9 recreational cyclists on something called a "Stroop test." Stroop tests, which require subjects to quickly and correctly name colors appearing in the text of other colors. For example, the word "blue" written in red text. This type of test is often used to examine what scientists call inhibitory control, commonly referred to as willpower. The results found that the professional cyclists outperformed the recreational cyclists on the Stroop test. In addition, the professional cyclists also performed better against a relative baseline, than the recreational cyclists in a hard bike ride following the Stroop test. In the words of the researchers, the professional cyclists showed both "stronger inhibitory control than the recreational cyclists" as well as "greater resistance to the effects of mental fatigue."

Samuele Marcora, director of research at the University of Kent's School of Sport and Exercise Science, says that "the two effects go hand in hand, because becoming resistant to mental fatigue bolsters self-control." He speculates that resistance to mental fatigue is trainable through practice.Another study found that when young people take up a meditation-and-running program, symptoms of major depressive disorder lessened by 40 percent on average, and another study found that when college students went from not exercising at all to visiting the gym a couple times a week, they had a greater "capacity for self-regulation," meaning that they could depend more on themselves than on substances. These students also reported less stress, smoking, and drinking and better eating, spending, and study habits.

People who undertake and endure exercise challenges tend to perform better in hard, yet unrelated, areas of their lives, such as quitting smoking or remaining calm during final exams. The scientific theory underlying this phenomenon is called the "cross-stressor adaptation hypothesis." In layperson's terms, exercise, likely due to its unique combination of being hard on the brain and the physiological changes it elicits, makes people more resilient not only to physical stress, but also to emotional and cognitive stress. It is for these reasons that scientists have written that "exercise is associated with emotional resilience to acute stress in healthy adults" and that exercise has been called a keystone habit, or an activity that leads to positive changes in other areas of life.

CT Quit Line: 1-800-QUIT-NOW

CT Poison Control 24/hotline: 1-800-222-1222

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HAPPENINGS AROUND TOWN

Meditation and Yoga- Mansfield Public Library is offering free meditation and yoga courses in Buchanan Auditorium. The classes are offered on March 6,13,27 from 10:00– 11:30 am. Check out the website for more information!

O'Hartford 5K– The Hartford Marathon Foundation presents the O'Hartford 5K. The event will take place on Sunday March 17th. Bring your little leprechauns for the Wee Mile, a ¼ mile, ½ mile or one-mile race for kids ages 2-11. For more information and to register, click the link!

Hebron Maple Festival- Enjoy maple syrup, candy, and other goodies at the Hebron Maple Festival! There are many vendors and activities for the family to enjoy. You can even check out the maple sugar houses to see how to make REAL maple syrup. The festival runs from 10 am-4 pm on Saturday the 16th and Sunday the 17th.

Broccoli Soup

INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/2 cups chopped broccoli (or 10-ounce pkg. frozen broccoli)
- 1/4 cup diced celery
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 1 cup low sodium chicken broth
- 2 cups nonfat milk
- 2 Tbsp. cornstarch
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- Dash pepper
- Dash ground thyme
- 1/4 cup grated Swiss cheese

DIRECTIONS

Place vegetables and broth in saucepan. Bring to boil, reduce heat, cover, and cook until vegetables are tender (about 8 minutes). Mix milk, cornstarch, salt, pepper, and thyme; add to cooked vegetables. Cook, stirring constantly, until soup is lightly thickened and mixture just begins to boil. Remove from heat. Add cheese and stir until melted.

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Sleep Awareness

Sleep helps you think more clearly, have quicker reflexes and focus better But sleep isn't just essential for the brain. "Sleep affects almost every tissue in our bodies," says Dr. Michael Twery, a sleep expert. "It affects growth and stress hormones, our immune system, appetite, breathing, blood pressure and cardiovascular health." Research shows that lack of sleep increases the risk for obesity, heart disease and infections. Throughout the night, your heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure rise and fall, a process that may be important for cardiovascular health. Your body releases hormones during sleep that help repair cells and control the body's use of energy. These hormone changes can affect your body weight.

"Ongoing research shows a lack of sleep can produce diabetic-like conditions in otherwise healthy people," says Dr. Merrill Mitler, a sleep expert.

Although personal needs vary, on average, adults need 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night. Babies typically sleep about 16 hours a day. Young children need at least 10 hours of sleep, while teenagers need at least 9 hours. To attain the maximum restorative benefits of sleep, getting a full night of quality sleep is important.

Sleep can be disrupted by many things. Stimulants such as caffeine or certain medications can keep you up. Distractions such as electronics, especially the light from TVs, cell phones, tablets and e-readers, can prevent you from falling asleep.

A good night's sleep consists of 4 to 5 sleep cycles. Each cycle includes periods of deep sleep and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, when we dream. "As the night goes on, the portion of that cycle that is in REM sleep increases. It turns out that this pattern of cycling and progression is critical to the biology of sleep," Twery says.

But how much sleep do you really need? The National Sleep Foundation released the results of a world-class study that took more than two years of research to complete. Read the report by clicking this link.

Be Well is an employee wellness program provided through the Eastern Highlands Health District with funding from the CT Department of Public Health. The goal of the program is to make the healthy choice the easy choice.