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Why We Feel Good from Exercise

Why is it that we feel so good after exercising? That state of well being, how is it explained? In only the last few generations, sedentary living has been made possible by automation and technology, to the detriment of our health. Mankind's early existence and survival depended on his or her physical strength. Now that our livelihoods no longer require physical exertion, it is essential that we maintain stamina with regular exercise.

The Benefits are More than Physical

Volumes have been written on the physiologic effects of exercise. It increases self-esteem, fat metabolism, coordination, stamina, muscle tone and flexibility, while decreasing stress and disease. Often over-looked, however, is the additional benefit of pain reduction.

After 40 minutes of light exercise like jogging, swimming, bicycling and power-walking, the body releases pain-killing hormones called encephalins into the brain. They block pain signals from entering the 'pain interpretation center' (limbic area) in the brain. Enkephalins are effective for 8 to 24 hours.

After only 20 minutes of vigorous exercise like lifting weights or strenuous manual labor, substances known as endorphins are then released. Endorphins are more effective as pain blockers and can last up to four days. In part, this is why it is most beneficial to do aerobics more often than weight-lifting.

How Often One Should Train

Our objective should be to exercise four to five times per week in order to maintain optimal levels of encephalins and three times a week to maintain optimal levels of endorphins. Exercising less than twice a week, regardless of whether it is light or rigorous, subjects us to mood swings resulting from irregular production of pain inhibitors and blood sugar variations. Regular exercise helps eliminate the distraction of pain. This greater personal freedom allows us to enjoy life's pleasure more.

Exercising can produce pain, especially after long layoffs. More than ever, Americans are exercising regularly. Most, however, are unaware of the potential dangers. Exercise can be harmful if not performed within limits.

All of the major muscle groups should be stretched before exercising, especially those directly involved. The more strenuous the activity and the longer the layoff, the slower the 'break-in-period' should be. Walking may require only two weeks of gradually increasing ones distance and speed, whereas racquetball, weightlifting and/or jogging may require four weeks.

In Health,

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