

# Habits for a Healthy Life

## Healthy Habit #2

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Three weeks ago Dr. Elizabeth George and the Mercersburg Area Council for Wellness introduced the first of our healthy lifestyle habits by sharing the benefits of including several servings of fruits and vegetables in our diets.

If you made the commitment toward incorporating more fruits and vegetables into your diet over the past 21 days, then you have established a more healthy eating habit, and you are ready for healthy habit #2 - developing cardiovascular or aerobic fitness.

Developing cardiovascular fitness, also referred to as aerobic fitness, is about improving the functioning of your heart, lungs and vascular system. An efficiently operating cardiovascular system optimizes the body's ability to deliver and use the oxygen necessary for work, play, exercise and daily activities.

The best way to improve your cardiovascular health is through performance of aerobic exercise which, simply put, is any type of exercise that increases the workload on the heart and lungs. Examples of aerobic exercise include walking, jogging, biking, swimming, circuit training and aerobic classes.

The benefits of aerobic exercise extend beyond a more efficiently operating cardiovascular system and include the following:

- protection against development of coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension and non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus;
- reduced risk of osteoporosis;
- control of body fat;
- increased resistance to fatigue and extra energy;
- improved mood, decrease in anxiety and depression;
- improved ability to sleep restfully.

To get these benefits from your aerobic workout, it is important for you to sustain your workout for 30 minutes and perform that workout 5 times a week. Your workout should raise your heart rate but not leave you out of breath.

One easy way to determine your intensity level is with the talk test. Simply say a sentence in the middle of your workout; if you are too winded then you are overdoing it, and if it is easy to talk then kick it up a notch.

There are a few important suggestions to make when starting your program.

- Remember to choose an activity you will enjoy, not something that you think you should be doing.

- Go easy at first and gradually build on the frequency and duration of your workout. Perhaps start out with 15 minute workouts and gradually increasing to 30 minutes; or, begin working out three days a week and work up to five days.

- Start each workout session with a five minute warm-up and end it with a five minute cool down. That means start out easily and wind down gradually; this eases the overall stress placed on the body.

- Good footwear is essential if you are walking or jogging.

- If you have any concerns whether you should be undertaking such a program, then see your physician.

Now if your health is such that traditional aerobic exercise is not practical for you, then do not despair. The CDC reports that you can improve your cardiovascular health by "accumulating 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity over the course of most days of the week."

Beneficial daily activities include: walking stairs, gardening, raking leaves, walking the dog, dancing, mall walking and shopping, carrying grocery bags, and carrying or pushing a golf bag.

While reports indicate that 60% of US adults do not engage in recommended amounts of physical activity, there are also approximately 25% of adults who are not active at all. For those people who are not active and wish to improve their cardiovascular health, I encourage you to simply get moving and build some momentum with respect to increasing your daily activities; perhaps you could begin by standing and walking in place during the commercials of your favorite TV show.

Finally, let me encourage our adults to get our children involved in physical activity. Set an example for them through your commitment to fitness, as well as invite them to join you in hiking, biking, walking or simply shooting a few baskets. You're only 21 days from establishing a new positive lifestyle habit. Have Fun!



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