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BENEFITS OF EXERCISING BEYOND THE HEART

With all the medical information in the zeitgeist, on the internet, and in your doctor's offices, I'm often asked where to begin when changing poor habits to healthy ones. For some, I start with smoking, or diet, or changes in medication. As an overall rule, however, my advice would be for everyone to exercise. Exercise is a preventative measure against stroke, heart disease, diabetes, and other diseases. Best of all, regular exercise can result in a variety of fantastic effects - some of which are immeasurably beneficial.

Some people hear this and think I'm suggesting they strive to suddenly become Olympic athletes. That's certainly not my intention. I have patients who have been sedentary for years - for them, walking for 20 minutes a day would be a step in the right direction. In fact, research is showing us that even 20 minutes of exercise a day helps enormously.

Not only does exercise keep the body fit, it also helps regulate mood, decrease stress levels, and boost metabolism. People are more positive when they are active and feel good about the way they look and feel. Many patients of mine report that they not only feel better physically when they lose weight or tone their physique, but also that fitness allows them other intangible benefits that make life worthwhile: increased energy, more positive attitude, and greater enjoyment from life.

When we are overweight, overstressed, depressed, feeling listless, it's often difficult to feel good about spending time with others - sometimes even impossible. Patients who are regularly physically active often tell me that they connect more often with children and grandchildren; they are more social and feel comfortable dancing, swimming, playing golf and more.

One of the exercise routines I advocate the most is swimming. There are water aerobic classes and swim classes throughout the year, and the water makes exercise easier on joints. As a longtime tennis lover, I like tennis too: it's a sport you can pick up at any age, it's social, it's a skillful game employing both aerobic and anaerobic exercise. Anything that's fun and gets the heart rate up is great; anything that pushes you to burn fat, gain muscle, and breathe deeply is excellent.

Any time you start an exercise and/or diet regimen, please consult your physician first. He or she can help tailor a routine to your specific abilities and needs. There are groups to join, classes to take, and friends to meet. I cannot emphasize this enough either, but there are benefits exercise can bring to your relationships, and relationship to yourself. Whether your personal goal is to run a marathon or fit into a certain outfit or go scuba diving, there is a journey filled with accomplishment awaiting you.

Couples who exercise together are often more aware of each other's limitations, successes, and goals than couples who don't share that time together. Exercise boosts self-esteem and increases body

awareness, often resulting in increased sexual desire and stamina. Even a short walk around the neighborhood holding hands can create closeness between two people and get fresh air and exercise.

Hydration is another key to exercise, especially in the summer. Even if you are working out indoors, please be sure to drink water before, during and after your workout. Stretching before and after exercise keeps you limber and lithe, and can also allow you to get more from your workouts.

Running, yoga, Zumba, weightlifting, elliptical, swimming, cycling - whatever you choose, make sure you have fun so you'll stay with it. As I said, you learn a lot about yourself and others when you set goals and reach them, and when you open yourself up to new experiences and try a variety of activities. You may just find your inner athlete and an enhanced self in new-found radiant health!

Listen to Dr. Galichia's Radio Show – "Take Your Health to Heart" every Saturday from 11 AM to Noon on 1480 KQAM in Wichita. If you have any medically related questions, please call us during the LIVE broadcast at 1-800-TALK-997 or 1-800-825-5997. You can also e-mail your questions anytime to

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