

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS- Physical Activity: Improving Your Health

For centuries, physical activity has been associated with good health. Now, science has confirmed the link.

I'm Dr. Mark Pochapin Director of the Jay Monahan Center at the Weill Medical College of Cornell University.

If you're physically active and want to learn how to achieve the maximum benefits for your efforts, or if you've been wanting to get started on the right exercise plan, watch *Physical Activity: Improving Your Health* to help you take the next steps.

Narrator

Two years ago, 55-year old Ellen Fike was shocked to discover she had high blood pressure. She'd never been athletic, but she'd always been in pretty good shape. Suddenly, though, the extra 20 pounds she'd gained over the years seemed to take on new weight ... and she knew she'd have to start eating better and exercising to get healthy.

Ellen Fike, Patient

"Everybody wants to look good and so I'm not different from that, I wanted to be able to fit into clothes without having to worry about how I could button my blazer or not. But really I just wanted to stay active and healthy for as long as I can so I don't have to be kind of drooping around and not being able to be active when I got older."

Narrator

Being able to stay active into those later years is a great incentive to exercise, but groups like the American College of Sports Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have still more.

Jeannine Donato

Shands Hospital

"Exercise, of course, as we know, it strengthens the heart. And of course, one of the benefits that we see is maintaining a healthy body weight and losing weight, toning up. The list goes on and on."

Narrator

Exercise also offers increased stamina, better self-confidence, and improved mental state ... So with all those benefits, what prevents people from exercising?

Jeannine Donato

"Most people have such a, I guess, a negative thought about exercise that you know, it really discourages them to get started."

Narrator

In her role as a Health Educator at a Florida hospital, Jeannine Donato hears a lot of excuses from people who don't engage in physical activity.

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS- Physical Activity: Improving Your Health

Jeannine Donato

“The biggest excuse today is “I don’t have time.”

Narrator

And time IS a legitimate excuse. Guidelines recommend 30 minutes of physical activity several days a week.

Ellen Fike

“I was guilty, as most people are, I guess, of thinking, well, if I don’t have a whole hour to devote to exercise, I might as well not do any, where I realize now that really, if you can have 10 or 15 minutes twice a day, that’s better than nothing twice a day.”

Narrator

And the experts say that that activity – whether it’s in 10, 15, 20 or 30 minute blocks – doesn’t have to be a structured workout.

Jose Antonio, PhD

Florida International Univ.

“People associate exercise with always being hard exercise when in fact even a limited amount of easy exercise is better than none. For instance, if you walk three times a week for just 20 minutes that actually has a pretty profound physiologic impact on health and on fitness, so a little bit is always better than nothing when it comes to exercise.”

Jeannine Donato

“I try to get people to realize that it’s just about moving more, just move your body more. I mean, physical activity is just moving your body through space, so it doesn’t matter whether you do housework, wash your car, do yard work, just move your body more and that’s the most important thing.”

Narrator

At first, Ellen tried running, but the pounding hurt her knees and ankles, so instead, she dusted off her old bicycle and started biking. She’s come a long way in two years.

Ellen Fike

“I remember really huffing and puffing to do 3 or 4 miles on the bicycle when I first began. Now I do nine miles in 42 – 43 minutes without any difficulty at all ... (CUT) ... they say you have to find what works for you and it really does so it’s kind of nice when you come home from work I feel like I’m 8 years old again that I get to come home and change into my play clothes and go out for a bike ride.”

Narrator

Whatever type of physical activity patients choose to start doing, the experts say don’t put it off. WHAT they start doing is less important than WHEN they start doing it.

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS- Physical Activity: Improving Your Health

Stewart Eidelson, Md

“The single most important thing ... if you’re worried about how you’re going to function at 80, what matters is how you function right now.”

Ellen Fike

“I feel so much better at 55 than I ever expected to. I really, I don’t know, I had this idea when I was in my 30’s that when you’re in your mid-fifties, you have to be some kind of frumpy, plump, placid person and I feel so much more energetic now.”

Jeannine Donato

“You know, individuals do tell me all the time, yes, I did I felt so good after I came home, I wasn’t in the mood to do it, but once I completed it, they feel good about themselves.”

Ellen Fike

“I think if you really want to do it, you’re going to do it and I’ve got the best reason in the world: my health.”

Narrator

How strenuous should that aerobic activity be?

Narrator

The American College of Sports Medicine says that patients should always be able to catch their breath and speak while exercising. And while it’s normal to sense effort or even some discomfort when working hard, they shouldn’t feel pain.

Exercise has tremendous benefits, but it IS possible to over do it if patients are not prepared or if they neglect to take proper precautions – like warming up before exercising or stretching.

Jose Antonio, Phd

“If you’re extremely unfit, whether you’re older or younger, clearly you’ve got to do a good warm-up, so don’t ever skip the warm-up and go straight to the hard exercise ... (CUT) ... The best kind of warm-ups that you do are the ones that are specific to the sport. So let’s say you’re going to go out for a run, the best warm-up for a run is a slow jog. The best warm-up for lifting weights is to lift light weights.”

Narrator

Exercise can help towards a longer life of good health, but what can it do for patients who may have a physical condition that limits their ability to exercise? Stay tuned for the answer.

If you'll add just 30 min of walking to your daily regimen, you'll lose 20 lb over the course of a year.

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS- Physical Activity: Improving Your Health

Narrator

Over the last two decades, Wilfred Arnold has had two heart attacks and two double coronary bypass surgeries. To avoid a third of either, he now eats better, takes the medication his doctor prescribes, and engages in physical activity regularly.

Wilfred Arnold

Heart Patient

“I do a lot more exercise. I figured this is better than the pills, I think, at least that’s what everybody tells me it is, anyway. But I used to hate getting up walking; now I feel lost if I don’t.”

Narrator

Physical exercise offers lots of great rewards – from a smaller waist line and less depression to lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol readings – but people who’ve already survived a heart attack have an even greater incentive: preventing a repeat attack. The best way for them to get back into exercise, is to participate in a cardiac rehabilitation program.

Richard Lueker, Md

Specialty/Hospital Affiliation

“It’s very, very important ... they need to gain their strength back ... it’s important to modify the course of the disease ... it can also alter or slow down the progression of disease.”

Narrator

Here’s a surprising fact. Heart attack patients who participate in formal exercise programs like those at cardiac rehabilitation centers reduce their chances of dying from a repeat heart attack by 20% to 25%.

Richard Leuker, Md

“People who get that kind of activity and that kind of training can make a huge impact on how much better they feel ... after 12 weeks they’ve improved in terms of their stamina and energy somewhere between 50 and 100%.”

Dr. Jose Antonio

“If you are looking to improve heart function particular, I think aerobic exercise is great for that...its increases what we call cardiac output which is basically the amount of blood your heart can pump beat per time period...so it really strengthens the heart.”

Narrator

And regardless of whether patients are battling diabetes, heart failure, or coronary artery disease, they should their doctor before beginning an exercise regimen.

Narrator

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS- Physical Activity: Improving Your Health

And remember not all exercise is created equal, especially if you're a patient with heart disease.

John Cooke

“The exercise that I recommend for a person with heart disease or for a person that is at risk for heart disease ... a brisk walk or jog or biking or swimming that's a better form of exercise ... typified by weight lifting.....weight lifting is not a great form of exercise for someone who has heart disease or for someone who is at risk for heart disease because during that period of time that you are lifting the weight that you are straining your blood pressure goes up and quite a bit quite a bit more than if you are walking or jogging.”

Narrator

People suffering from heart disease may worry that exercise may actually CAUSE a heart attack. Although it is true that exercise itself and the period right after exercise are some of the most vulnerable periods for most heart patients, 9 out of 10 heart attacks occur while a person is resting, not while he or she is exercising.

So, patients should stop exercising and get help if they experience any of the following symptoms: pain or pressure in their chest, jaw, or neck, possibly radiating into the shoulder, arm, or back; unusual shortness of breath; dizziness or light-headedness; and heart rhythm abnormalities.

John Cooke

“If you have heart disease or if you are at high risk for heart disease before you start the exercise program. You really need to see a doctor possibly to have a treadmill exercise test done with EKG monitoring, monitoring of your heart rhythm, your blood pressure, to make certain that your not putting yourself at risk by initiating an exercise program. Its particularly true of someone who has been sedentary, a couch potato, that decides one day they want to change their life style it would be dangerous actually to go up and start galloping because you could actually over stress your heart. So it's important to see your doctor first if you haven't been exercising and you're at risk.”

Narrator

Exercise is a critical part of the recovery process, but it's important to begin slowly. Trying to do too much, too soon can leave one feeling discouraged and may even cause injury. Depending upon age and overall health, it might be best to start by walking only 5 or 10 minutes a day. Then, as the patients become more fit, they can gradually increase the length of activity, building up to a half-hour or more.

John Cooke, MD

“It's never too late to start an exercise and nutrition program ... you'll feel better, have more energy, and prevent heart attack and stroke.”

Narrator

Exercise has done wonders for Wilfred Arnold.

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS- Physical Activity: Improving Your Health

Wilfred Arnold

“It’s given me a lot more get up and go. I do more now at 72 than I did when I was 40 ...
... I feel terrific. I got no complaints whatsoever.”

Narrator

People with arthritis, or who have had joint replacements, have special exercise needs and requirements. We’ll take a look after this.

Narrator

The human body is an extremely complex organism. Even if the heart remains healthy, muscles, bones and joints may cause problems that make it difficult to stay fit. Osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, chronic back problems, back, hip or knee surgery – even total joint replacement – all of these conditions impact the way patients can and should exercise. Meet Louis J. Crecco. If he appears to be walking a little stiffly, he has good reason. Six months ago, he had both knees replaced. But that wasn’t an excuse for him to stop moving.

Louis J. Crecco

Joint Replacement Patient

“I’ve been active all my life, and to me being active is the most important thing in the world. I don’t – I’m old but I don’t want to be old and I’m not going to be old until they lay me down, then I’m old!”

Narrator

Recovering from joint replacement can take weeks, even months. In fact, six months after his surgery, Louis still suffers from pain in his knees. Under these circumstances, many patients might be understandably worried about overworking their new joints, but Louis knows what will happen if he doesn’t exercise.

Louis J. Crecco

“If you don’t exercise after a knee replacement, you’re not going to walk like you should. You’re not going to go up stairs like you should ...because they say, once that scar tissue develops, you’re not going to bend your knees anymore, so you have to keep bending, even though it hurts, you have to do it.”

Narrator

But it does matter what kind of exercise. Before he needed total joint replacement, Louis was an avid marathon runner. Now, running is out of the question.

Louis J. Crecco

“I can speed walk, if I can, and play golf, but no more running – nothing where you have to thump.”

Narrator

Joint replacement patients should avoid activities that place repeated stress on the

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS- Physical Activity: Improving Your Health

replacement. With a new knee or hip, for instance, running, jogging or skiing are forbidden activities, but low-impact exercises like swimming, bicycling, golf or working out on an elliptical trainer are perfectly acceptable. A physical therapist can demonstrate which movements or positions to avoid, and can help determine which exercises will help patients gain back their strength and mobility most effectively.

Louis J. Crecco

“Any advice? To listen and be sure to do the exercises that the rehab counselor tells them to do and do them diligently and religiously. That’s very important.”

Narrator

The same advice applies to those with osteoarthritis.

Stewart Eidelson, Md **Orthopedic Surgeon**

“There are a subset of patients who hurt ... because of arthritis ... for them, exercise is a little trickier ... I like non-load bearing exercises ... some can do treadmill, some can’t ... if you’re not certain how to do it ... spend a couple of hours with a trainer or a trained physical therapist at a hospital ... we have so many ways to exercise without irritating a joint.”

Narrator

Of course, one of the worst things patients can do to an arthritic joint, a new knee or a sore back is to stop using it all together. And because joints can stiffen, bones grow brittle and muscles atrophy if they are underused, exercise is a critical part of the rehabilitation and recovery process. With low back pain, for example, doctors used to prescribe rest, but now that’s all changed.

Stewart Eidelson, MD

“Now the theory is very little inactivity, lots of activity but it should be a very precise type of activity. We use physical therapists, sometimes chiropractic care, so we give guidance. So the new theory in back care is to get people exercising sooner.”

Narrator

Once a person’s initial back pain subsides, he can then begin low-impact exercises like walking, swimming, bicycling and strength training with light weights. The benefits of strength training may not seem as obvious as the benefits of cardiovascular exercise, but since patients lose 20 to 40 percent of muscle as they age, strength training exercises help maintain those muscles and burn more calories. And weight bearing exercises can also help avoid broken hips or other potentially devastating fractures in old age. For men and women with osteoporosis, strength-training with light weights, walking, hiking, stair climbing, dancing and racquet sports can all help slow the deterioration of bones and prevent fractures.

Narrator

What’s the best part about exercising to strengthen bones and joints? Patients are reaping

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS- Physical Activity: Improving Your Health

cardiovascular benefits as well by reducing their cholesterol, lowering their blood pressure and maintaining a healthy weight. Louis Crecco has achieved it all.

Louis J. Crecco

“That’s the fruits of exercise, I guess, and eating good, living good, I like my martinis, of course, never give them up!”

Narrator

Next up: no gym? No weights? No matter. How keeping fit can be a real walk in the park.

Don’t have time to go to the gym? No problem. According to the American College of Sports Medicine, gardening, carrying your groceries, or cleaning storage spaces can improve your muscular and strength endurance, and may reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

Narrator

For patients who are exercising to avoid health problems or to recover from them, walking is one of the easiest, safest and most effective exercises that most of us can do. And though it seems a low-key kind of exercise, the health benefits are still tremendous.

In fact, studies have shown that people who walk an hour a day every day can reduce their risk of diabetes by 50%, their risk of heart disease by 30 – 40% and their risk of stroke by 20 – 27%.

Walking, it seems, is just what the doctor ordered. In fact, more than 90% of physicians recommend walking over anything else. It's low impact, inexpensive, and convenient.

Jeannine Donato

Shands Hospital

“And when it comes to exercise, if it’s not convenient, it’s not going to happen. I mean, with most people today – not everybody, some people are really self-motivated – the general population is not self-motivated, so they need something convenient.”

Narrator

A health movement called “10,000 Steps to Better Health” is designed to help people find that self-motivation.

Sue Friedman

Jackson Memorial Hospital

“And what they’re saying is if you can walk 10,000 steps a day, that’s equivalent to 5

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS- Physical Activity: Improving Your Health

miles. So they have pedometers that you can actually wear on your waist and you put it on in the morning and it will track every step that you take and at the end of the day, hopefully you're up to 10,000 steps. Generally, sedentary people walk between 2000 and 3000 steps a day, which is a small fraction of what they're suggesting you do walk so that's another way to try to encourage people to walk more and they can kind of motivate themselves from day to day to day."

Narrator

Though walking may be too stressful for some patients with severe joint problems, most can do it without experiencing any discomfort or risk. They still need to have good shoes, though.

It's important for people to find a good place to walk – outside the house, at the beach, at the gym – and keep it fun by making it social, joining a walking group, or listening to music or books on tape.

Jeannine Donato

"And I just stress walking, you know, ask a friend or a partner – whomever it may be – to commit to walking a few nights a week or go to the mall. If it's raining or snowing out, whatever the weather is, you always have a mall that's open, you can walk the mall. There are a lot of ideas."

Narrator

Of course, some people will start exercising with the best intentions, but give up if they don't feel they're making enough progress.

Jose Antonio, PhD

"You should think of exercise as achieving progress not perfection. Because people always think, well, if I exercise, I should look like that fitness model. Well, no, if you exercise you should look like yourself but better. So you've got to incorporate it as a habit, one, and two you can't expect perfection."

Narrator

They CAN expect better health, more stamina, and improved quality of life. It's worked for Ellen Fike.

Ellen Fike

"Days that I come home really exhausted and I think "I don't want to do it, I don't want to do it," by the time I get to mile two on my trip I am so glad I'm out there and I feel so much

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS- Physical Activity: Improving Your Health

more relaxed and when I come home I'm in better spirits, I've got more energy to get through making dinner and doing paperwork if I have to and getting through my evening. The days that I don't go typically are the days that I end up napping and dragging through the evening so if you're looking for something that's going to help you get more active in your life, get more energy, exercise it's got to be."

Jeannine Donato

"Just take that first step outside the door and then the other foot's going to follow and once you get started you're going to feel so much better that you actually did it."

Narrator

Whether it's exercising to stay slim, recover from illness, or regain mobility, the biggest risk patients face is the risk of not starting. With a few precautions and a little motivation, every one of us can begin moving towards a fitter future.