

3 Health Problems Fixed With Exercise

When it comes to preventing health problems,” says Dr. David Katz, founding director of the Yale University Prevention Research Center, “exercise is one of the best medicines we have.” And as it turns out, certain exercises target certain health problems—regardless of your age or physical ability.

So, if you want to feel better when it comes to these three specific health problems—while potentially adding years to your life—be sure to include the related exercises in your “personal toolkit” of ways to achieve better health and living.

1. Insomnia/low energy. “We aren’t sure why activity primes your body for sleep so well, but it’s likely a combination of factors, including lowering your core body temperature, increasing the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin and supporting a biological need to restore energy levels and repair cells and tissues when you sleep,” says Brad Cardinal, co-director of the sport and exercise psychology program at Oregon State University.

Although the reasons are hard to understand, the results are well documented and easy to define. Cardinal sums it up best by saying, “Exercisers fall asleep faster, suffer fewer middle-of-the-night wake-ups and have a reduced risk of sleep disorders.”

As for the best exercise to get you into that “good sleep equals more energy” routine, work your way up to 150 minutes per week of moderate activity. (Because exercise is stimulating, be sure to finish your workout at least three hours before bedtime.) For a moderate activity, yoga is hard to beat. Plus, a 2012 study has proven that yoga, along with

deep-breathing techniques, relieved insomnia within four months. And a 2011 study found that when you exercise 150 minutes a week, you are 65 percent less likely to run out of energy during the day.

2. Food cravings/weight gain. If you constantly give in to food cravings or always snack, then you will likely experience weight gain. Trying to curb these habits with sheer willpower is tough because “in the throes of a craving, your brain is saying, ‘Feed me dopamine!’—that neurotransmitter that taps into the reward center of your brain. You can satisfy the call with carbs—or with exercise,” says Dr. John Ratey, the author of *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*.

What is the best exercise for crushing those cravings? Whenever you find yourself reaching for a snack, reach instead for your sneakers and take a brisk 15-minute walk. (Recent research has proven this will short-circuit those food-craving messages in your head.)

3. Weakened immune system. Aerobic exercises coax immune cells out of body tissues and into your bloodstream, where they attack invading viruses and bacteria, explains David Nieman, a professor at Appalachian State University. His research has shown conclusively that five days of aerobic exercise a week reduces sick days by 43 percent.

Some of the best aerobic exercises are jogging, cycling and dancing. Simply do something aerobic for 30 minutes almost every day, and you will be boosting your immune system naturally.

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health.

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