

Exercise; The best Prescription your Doctor can give you.

If you haven't heard the news already, then look around and you can't miss it, we, as a national are getting fatter and unhealthier every year that passes. Almost 1 in 3 adults are obese (31%) and a further 35% are overweight. This means 2 out of every 3 adults in New Zealand are above the weight they should be for their height. It seems ludicrous that in this day and age, as medicine is constantly evolving, New Zealanders are actually becoming unhealthier as each year passes.

Now imagine going to you doctor and being told that if you took this certain prescription it would reduce your risk of cancer by up to 50%, and as a side effect it would also reduce the incidence of death, heart disease and stroke by 35%, diabetes by 50%, breast cancer by 20% and hip fracture by 68%. The prescription would seem like the magic pill to take wouldn't it? We would all be lining up for the chance to take it wouldn't we? Well that is exactly what regular physical activity can do for you. So why aren't more people do it? Because it actually involves active participation from the patient, instead of passively just popping a pill.

Rising rates of inactivity is one of the main causes of Kiwis becoming unhealthier. One out of seven (14%) New Zealanders are physically inactive, meaning they have done less than 30 minutes of moderate exercise in the past week. This is up from 2006 when it was only 1 in 10 adults. Not surprisingly, along with this increase in physically inactive kiwis, the rates of chronic pain, osteoarthritis, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, depression and obesity have also increased.

There is overwhelming strong evidence that low physical activity is a major cause of non-communicable disease. The World Health Organization shows that the leading causes of morbidity and mortality are high blood pressure (13% of total deaths), tobacco use (9%), high blood glucose (6%), physical inactivity (6%) and obesity (5%). Physical inactivity is not only an independent risk factor but influences most of the other causes. Physical inactivity has been described as the greatest public health threat in today's society.

The Ministry of Health recommends that adults do at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (e.g., brisk walking or equivalent vigorous activity) at least five days per week. This totals 150 minutes per week. Children and young people (5-18 years of age) are recommended to do at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

Physical exercise is above your normal duties during the day. Even though you may feel that you do enough walking during the day, or you are too tired after work, it is important to make yourself go for a walk for half an hour, and I guarantee you, you will be better once you have done this. So let's have a look at what physical exercise can do for us, and remember, this is only 30 minutes a day, which everyone can fit into their day.

Physical activity will reduce your risk of heart disease by 22% in men and 33% in women, interestingly inactivity carries a similar risk for heart disease as smoking and increased BP. And it is not too late to start, inactive men who became active at 50 years of age, have a 49% reduction in mortality at the age of 60 compared to those who remained inactive.

The amount of exercise you do is inversely related to levels of depression, meaning the more you do the better you feel. There is very strong evidence to show that the risk of depression is reduced by 1/3 with physical activity.

In a study looking at pre diabetes, increased exercise and a good diet was more successful (58%) in preventing the progression to full diabetes than taking medication (31%). What's more this exercise intervention can then delay the onset of diabetes for up to 14 years after the intervention.

Moderate exercise also helps to prevent the development of osteoarthritis, reduces pain and increases function in patients with existing hip and knee OA. This increases the quality of cartilage and muscle strength, improves mobility and balance which helps to reduce the risk of fractures and improve quality of life.

So after seeing the evidence I hope this helps to change your way of thinking, from believing there is a 'pill for every ill', to taking an active role in your own health care. Medication should be the last resort in managing disease, not the first port of call. You as patients need to take an active role in your care, instead of passively taking medication to manage conditions like hypertension, heart disease and diabetes.

So I challenge you, to make a difference to your health and wellbeing and get active, for at least 30 mins for 5 days of the week. If you feel like you need any advice with this, we as physiotherapists are trained to guide you with exercise that is safe for you to complete, if you cannot walk due to pain, then swimming, an exercycle and even light weights can be done instead. If you need advice please give us a call and we will be happy to help. If you do have complex medical problems please check first with your GP before starting any exercise program, and make sure you do not stop taking any

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medication without advice from your doctor. Thanks for reading and have a physically active day ☺