

## Ross' Precision Health & Fitness Newsletter

### Issue #4 – 12/1/2006 – Exercise During the Holidays

Well it's already December and the holiday season is in full swing. Hopefully you didn't overdo it too much on Thanksgiving and are back to eating small healthy meals throughout the day. Actually I am very encouraged, because it sounds like most of you did a good job controlling your eating. Now it's just a matter of keeping it up and possibly even improving your nutritional habits from this point forward.

Maintaining healthy eating habits is one of the most effective ways to stay healthy and prevent fat gain during the holidays, but nutrition alone is generally not enough. Since the previous newsletters have focused on nutrition, I decided to go in a different direction and focus on the other big issue, exercise.

It is common knowledge that people experience the best health and fitness results when they consistently eat healthy and exercise. Doing one or the other is not as beneficial, although some positive results are possible. During the holidays people frequently ignore their nutrition and exercise and adopt the "I'll get back on track next year philosophy." As discussed in previous newsletters, this doesn't work with nutrition and it's equally harmful with exercise.

Even if you maintain your healthy eating habits and keep your caloric intake the same, you can still gain fat if you stop exercising. If you want to minimize fat gain while exercising less, you have to decrease your caloric intake. If you normally burn 300 calories per day through exercise, you will have to decrease your caloric intake by 300 calories if you stop exercising. Also, if you stop exercising, your resting metabolic rate may decline (you will burn less calories throughout the day), which further increases the potential for fat gain.

Now, assuming you already have a plan to control your eating during the holidays, it's time to concentrate on your exercise. If you don't have many extra commitments and are staying in town, continuing your current exercise routine shouldn't be too difficult. As a result, this issue will focus on the main problems people encounter during the holidays, such as not having access to equipment or bad weather. Also, the article will give advice on prioritizing exercise and creating efficient workouts when you cannot exercise as much as usual.

If your schedule during the holidays is significantly different than usual, you will likely need to make some changes in order to maintain a regular exercise routine. This can be especially problematic if you spend a lot of time traveling during the holidays. Each of you will encounter different obstacles, but the key is to figure out what problems are likely to occur and make a plan to minimize their impact or avoid them completely.

Below are descriptions and potential solutions for 2 of the most common problems you may encounter during the holidays:

1. Climate Changes – If you live in a warm climate and usually exercise outside, traveling somewhere with freezing temperatures can make it difficult to complete your normal

activities. The obvious solution is to bundle up and exercise anyway, but this can be rather uncomfortable and even dangerous in some cases (e.g. biking on icy roads).

A better solution is to find an alternative means of exercise, such as using a treadmill or stationary bike. If you are staying in a hotel there will probably be at least one exercise machine on site. If you are staying with friends/family they might have something as well. Another option if you cannot find any equipment could be to find a facility, such as a mall, that offers indoor walking before the stores open. What you find may not be ideal, but doing something is better than not doing anything.

2. Resistance Training/Gyms – If you usually workout at a gym or lift weights at home, taking your equipment with you is probably not an option. If you are lucky, you will have a membership to a gym with locations across the country and there will be a facility near where you are staying.

If you really want to exercise in a gym, there are some options other than having a membership. If you are staying with friends/family one of them may have a gym membership and they might be able to get you in as a guest. Also, most gyms offer day or week passes even if you don't have a membership, although these can be expensive. Just call the nearby gyms and ask, because rules vary considerably from gym to gym.

Another option is to design an exercise program before you leave for your trip, which is made up of exercises requiring little or no equipment. You have many options including using bodyweight exercises, bands/tubing, and if you are driving you can even take some dumbbells and an exercise ball with you.

It is important to note that being active and exercising are not necessarily the same thing. Even if you are shopping all day and walking for hours, you will not receive the same benefits as a 30-60 minute aerobic workout. Light walking will burn some calories, but if you are not walking intensely enough to increase your heart rate or stress your muscles, your body will not be challenged and you will not have positive results. Also, if this continues for many days or weeks, your fitness level and metabolism will decrease as well.

Ideally, you will be able to maintain the same exercise intensity, frequency, and duration as usual, but chances are you will need to make some changes. If you know you will have less time to exercise during the holidays, you should plan to make the most of the opportunities you do have. The key is to create efficient workouts that focus on the exercise related benefits that are most important to you. Since this is an important and potentially complicated topic, it is also the subject of this issue's article

The article discusses how different workouts produce different results and explains how to alter your workouts to maximize your results, when your time is limited. The premise is to help you stay exercising during the holidays or when out of town, but the information is useful for designing efficient workouts that give you the specific results you want in any situation.

## Featured Article

### Prioritizing Workouts: Creating Efficient Workouts to Maximize Your Results Part 1

Having a well-designed exercise program can be the difference between getting the results you want and failing to achieve your goals. One of the most important aspects of any good program is variety. Exercising results in many positive adaptations, such as improved cardiovascular health, strength, bone density, endurance, flexibility, etc. However, there is no best exercise or workout to optimally improve all aspects of health and fitness at the same time.

Different physical adaptations respond better to different types of workouts. For example, if one of your goals is to improve bone density and prevent osteoporosis, you must perform weight-bearing activity (e.g. lift weights) to provide your bones with a stimulus for growth. Swimming on the other hand is good for your joints, but it will not do anything to improve your bones.

Also, results are not only affected by different types of exercise, but also by the way the exercise is performed. Take running for instance, marathon runners and sprinters both run, but they use different training programs to produce very different results. Obviously, it's important to design your workouts with long-term goals in mind or you will end up wasting time and energy exercising in ways that are inefficient for reaching your specific goals.

Regardless of your particular goals, it is still important to use a variety of different workouts, because you should never completely neglect an aspect of health and fitness. You just need to figure out which aspects are most important to you and spend more time on workouts that focus on improving those particular attributes.

This is also the key to creating efficient and effective workouts that maximize your results, especially during the holidays or other times where you cannot exercise as much as usual. While explaining how to maximize all aspects of fitness is beyond the scope of this article, I will focus on the foundations of any well-rounded health and fitness program: flexibility, exercising for fat loss, endurance, strength, and injury prevention/rehab.

#### Flexibility

I wanted to start with flexibility, because it is the one fitness component that will not be affected by your schedule, equipment, or other factors that could affect your ability to exercise. Flexibility is primarily maintained and improved by stretching, which can take place virtually anywhere with minimal or no equipment. While it is true that stretching is most effective when your muscles are warmed up (e.g. after exercise), you will benefit from stretching at any time.

When people don't stretch it is usually because they either choose to skip it, forget about it, or believe they don't have enough time. If someone forgets or chooses not to stretch, they need to make stretching a higher priority, because flexibility is very important. Unfortunately, many people fail to understand the importance of flexibility until after they develop joint or muscle problems that could have been avoided by a regular stretching routine.

Skipping stretching because you don't have enough time is never a good excuse. Sometimes you may not be able to stretch right after you exercise, which is ideal, but there is no reason not to stretch later. A common misconception is that you have to perform all of your stretches during the same period of time. This causes many people to feel as though they need to block out a chunk of time for stretching, but this is simply not the case.

Performing 1 or 2 stretches at a time throughout the day can improve or maintain your flexibility just as much as grouping all your stretches together. Also, since most stretches do not require any equipment, you can do them almost anywhere. For example, sitting in your car while stuck in traffic is a great time to perform neck and shoulder stretches.

Actually, any time you are waiting is a great stretching opportunity. You could be at the gas station waiting for your vehicle to fill up or even waiting in line at a store. While you may feel self-conscious about stretching in front of other people, many stretches are very discreet and often people won't even realize you are stretching.

If you are traveling there are a number of stretching opportunities as well. If you are taking a long drive, any time you stop for food, restrooms, etc., you should take a couple minutes to stretch. If you are flying, you can stretch in the airport and on the plane almost whenever you want. Plus stretching during your travels will help you feel better after you arrive at your destination.

If you are at home, it's even easier to find times to stretch. Watching TV, reading e-mail, or even taking a bath or shower provides great stretching opportunities. I could go on and on, but I'm sure you can see how easy it is to find time for stretching. It just requires some conscious effort to make stretching a part of your daily routine.

### Exercising for Fat Loss

This section will essentially deal with the question of what exercise/workout is best for losing fat. This is probably the issue I am asked about most and it is also a source of confusion for many people. The problem is there are many different opinions about the best way to lose fat and there is generally some truth to each of the various opinions.

One popular opinion suggests concentrating on the percentage of calories from fat that you burn during the exercise. This leads to recommendations for exercising at a particular intensity/heart rate, which is often called the fat burning zone. This sounds like a good way to figure out how to exercise for maximal fat burning, but when you exercise to burn the highest percentage of fat, you end up burning fewer total calories, because the exercise intensity is too low.

Other people suggest focusing on the total number of calories burned during your workout instead of the actual fat calories. This is recommended because unless you burn more calories throughout the day than you consume, you will never lose fat, regardless of the percentage of calories you burn while exercising. This is true, but just looking at the number or type of calories burned while exercising never gives you the full story.

There are however other important factors that are often overlooked when determining how to exercise for optimal fat loss. First, some types of exercise, such as resistance training, may not burn a lot of calories during the actual workout, but your body will keep burning calories at a higher rate for many hours after you stop exercising. This increased calorie burning effect will vary depending on the duration, intensity, and type of exercise. As a result, it becomes very difficult to accurately determine how many calories are really burned due to your workout.

Fortunately, knowing how many calories or how much fat you burn while exercising is not as important as you might think. The real issue is how your workout affects your metabolism. Increasing your metabolism is by far the most beneficial thing you can do to improve long-term fat loss. Your metabolism is responsible for burning many more calories than exercise and if your main goal is fat loss, you should focus on increasing your metabolism as much as possible.

This is a very important issue and it will be covered more in future newsletters, but for the purpose of this article I will concentrate on a basic strategy to help keep your metabolism up during periods when you are not able to follow your normal exercise routine. Keep in mind this strategy is primarily used to create efficient workouts to stimulate your metabolism and is not meant to be a comprehensive exercise program.

This strategy essentially has 2 main goals, preventing muscle loss and challenging your body. Muscle has a significant influence on your metabolic rate and every pound of muscle burns about 30 calories per day. If you stop doing exercises that stress your muscles, you will start losing muscle and your metabolism will slow down as well. Moderate to high intensity resistance training (weights, bodyweight exercises, etc.) is an ideal choice for this type of workout.

As a general rule, you should perform exercises that are difficult enough that you are unable to perform 15 reps; 6 to 12 reps per exercise is a good range. This may be more intense than you are used to, but if you only have enough time for a short workout, it will be enough intensity to retain your current level of muscle. Also, since your workout will be short and the number of total sets will be low, you shouldn't have to worry about gaining muscle or bulking up. Bodybuilders have large muscles mainly because they perform an excessive number of sets, sometimes 20-30 per muscle group, not because they lift heavier weights.

The overall workout only needs to be 15-30 minutes long and you have some options as to how to design the workout. You can do 1 set of many different exercises, multiple sets of a few exercises or anything in between. With the increased intensity of the exercises, you probably won't want to exercise much longer anyway.

I also suggest performing a higher percentage of leg exercises (squats, lunges, etc.) than usual. This is because your largest muscles are in your legs and exercises that stress large muscles create a greater overall demand on the body and produce better metabolic improvements. Try for 35 - 40 % leg exercises if your workout is 30 minutes and around 50% if the workout is closer to 15 minutes. This approach will also maximize the number of calories burned during the workout and result in more calories being burned throughout the day.

If you would rather perform endurance activities (running, biking, etc.), you can apply the same principles of increasing the intensity to make the exercise more demanding. Perhaps the best method is to replace a constant intensity aerobic workout with a shorter interval training workout. This involves alternating between your normal pace and much more challenging pace. For example if you are a runner, you could alternate between running for 1 minute at your regular speed and sprinting for 30 seconds.

Regardless of which approach you take, you should feel about as fatigued at the end of your short workout as you do after a regular long workout. However, if you are not accustomed to more intense training, it is important to start out slowly and let your body adapt to the training. It is very important not to overdo it or push yourself too hard. You want to feel fatigued, but not run down or excessively sore. Also, even though the workout is short, you still need to warm up before the workout and stretch/cool down after you finish.

That's it for part 1. Part 2 will cover training for endurance, strength, and injury prevention/rehab.

## WRAP UP:

I am going to keep this really short, since I ended up writing more than I initially intended. Anyway, I hope this issue helps motivate you to keep exercising when your schedule is hectic and your time is limited. As for the next issue, I am still deciding between a couple ideas, but it will have the conclusion of the article.

Take care and have a great couple of weeks,

Ross