

Fighting Fatigue? Get More Exercise

Feeling tired? A walk may be better than a nap for boosting energy and fighting fatigue.

New research suggests regular exercise can increase energy levels even among people suffering from chronic medical conditions associated with fatigue, like cancer and heart disease.

It may seem counterintuitive, but researchers say expending energy by engaging in regular exercise may pay off with increased energy in the long run.

"A lot of times when people are fatigued, the last thing they want to do is exercise," says researcher Patrick O'Connor, PhD, in a news release. "But if you're physically inactive and fatigued, being just a bit more active will help," says O'Connor, co-director of the University of Georgia exercise psychology laboratory, in Athens, Ga.

"We live in a society where people are always looking for the next sports drink, energy bar, or cup of coffee that will give them the extra edge to get through the day," says researcher Tim Puetz, PhD, also of UGA. "But it may be that lacing up your tennis shoes and getting out and doing some physical activity every morning can provide that spark of energy that people are looking for."

Exercise Boosts Energy

Although many studies have shown that sedentary people who start a regular exercise program experience an increase in energy levels, researchers say few studies have quantified those effects.

In this study, published in *Psychological Bulletin*, the researchers analyzed 70 studies on exercise and fatigue involving more than 6,800 people.

"More than 90% of the studies showed the same thing: Sedentary people who completed a regular exercise program reported improved fatigue compared to groups that did not exercise," says O'Connor. "It's a very consistent effect."

The results show that regular exercise increases energy and reduces fatigue.

The average effect was greater than the improvement from using stimulant medications, including ones used for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy.

Researchers say nearly every group studied -- from healthy adults, to cancer patients, and those with chronic conditions including diabetes and heart disease -- benefited from exercise.

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SOURCE: Puetz, T. *Psychological Bulletin*, November 2006. News release, University of Georgia.