EXPLORING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF EXERCISE AND THEIR BENEFITS

Exercise is a fantastic tool that helps to keep us healthy and strong, as well as assisting in the management of chronic conditions. When this tool is utilised optimally, frequently and at the correct intensity, the results are impressive. It is important, though, to know which form of exercise to utilise for a specific goal. Let us explore the different forms of exercises along with their benefits.

Aerobic exercise

This form of exercise is also known as cardiovascular exercise. It requires your heart to pump oxygenated blood to the working muscles in order to provide them with oxygen to sustain the exercise. It stimulates an increase in your heart and breathing rate in such a way that it can be maintained through the exercise session.

Aerobic exercises can be classified into two categories:
Low-impact aerobic exercise – in this type of exercise, one foot will always be in contact with the ground, thus reducing the stress placed on your musculoskeletal system. Such exercises include walking and cycling.

High-impact aerobic exercises – in this type of exercise, more direct force on the body is involved and both feet come off the ground at the same time while performing the exercise, for example running and skipping. This type of aerobic exercise burns off more calories but the chances of injury are higher than in the case of low-impact exercises.

Aerobic exercises have a vast number of benefits which include:

- **Healthy body weight:** aerobic exercises paired with a healthy eating plan will result in weight loss.
- **Strong heart:** the heart is a muscle and due to the increased demands by aerobic exercise on the heart, it becomes stronger. A strong heart will pump blood more efficiently and this will improve the flow of oxygenated blood to the working muscles.
- **Managing chronic conditions:** a stronger heart will assist in lowering blood pressure as well as assist in controlling blood sugar.
- **Improved lung function:** your breathing rate increases during aerobic exercise and therefore you take in more air and oxygen, which allows your body to function more efficiently.
- **Decreased resting heart rate:** the heart becomes stronger through aerobic exercise and this results in a lower resting heart rate.

It is recommended that you partake in aerobic exercise three times a week for at least 30 minutes at a moderate to vigorous intensity in order to maintain a healthy weight and cardiorespiratory fitness.

Strength training

This type of exercise is where resistance is used to bring about a muscular contraction which in turn builds strength. This muscular strength comes about when there is a gradual increase in the muscle's ability to resist force. This force can be created through the use of free weights, weight machines, therabands and body weight.

The numerous benefits of strength training include:

- **Weight loss:** as you increase your muscle mass, you will burn more calories as muscle burns more calories than fat; this is due to a higher rate of metabolism within the muscle tissue.
- **Increased stamina:** due to increased strength, you will not fatigue easily, therefore you will have the ability to carry out exercise for a longer period of time.
- **Increased bone density:** this comes about as a result of the load that is placed on the bones during strength training.
- **Decreased body fat:** muscle burns more calories, therefore resulting in a decrease in body fat.

Strength training should be done at least twice a week, ensuring that you target all the muscle groups.

Stretching exercises

Stretching is a form of exercise where one applies tensile force to lengthen the muscle or tendon in order to improve the muscle's elasticity.

It is very important that one stretches before and after an exercise session. Stretching before an exercise session prepares the body for the exercise that is to come. One must also ensure that the correct type of stretching is utilised for their particular exercise session or sport.

Some of the benefits of stretching include:

- **More flexibility:** stretching increases your range of motion and flexibility.
- **Fewer injuries:** stretching prevents imbalances that can lead to serious injury.
- **Muscle relaxant:** after exercise stretching relaxes the muscles and assists in dissipating lactic acid that builds up during exercise.
- **Enhanced performance:** stretching plays a vital role in improving physical performance.

It is advised that one does a quick five-minute cardiovascular warm-up prior to stretching, as this will increase blood flow to the muscles and prevent an injury that may occur due to the use of an incorrect stretching technique. Increased blood flow to the muscles also assists in the production of synovial fluid which is responsible for lubricating joints.

It is very important to remember that when you stretch you do not move around as this may lead to injury. Always hold your stretch still for about 30 seconds while breathing normally. You should never feel pain during a stretch; if you feel pain it means that you have stretched too far. You must aim to feel a stretch in the muscle without pain.

Stretching can be part of your daily routine and can be performed at the time of the day which is most convenient for you. It will increase your flexibility, along with giving you improved balance which will assist in performing daily activities, especially as you age.

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