

My Journey to Improved Physical Fitness: A Personal Reflection

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Since my teens, I love writing code and I believe in the power of programming to transform and improve the lives of people around the world. Today I am an Honor Program student in computer engineering at Qatar University. I am passionate about robotics, machine learning, and space applications. I enjoy football, ice-skating, and volunteer work.

As a computer engineer, my studies involve long hours of sitting and staring at a computer screen. Unfortunately, this sedentary lifestyle has made it challenging for me to maintain good physical health. There have been days when I remained seated for hours without engaging in any form of exercise. Recognizing the need to break this pattern and improve my physical fitness, I decided to enroll in a physical fitness course. Hoping that this course will equip me with the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance my overall physical health, as well as provide motivation to be more active and incorporate exercise into my daily routine. Through this reflection paper, I will share my journey of overcoming my sedentary habits, following the advice of Prof. Lina from our class, and developing a more active lifestyle.

During the initial weeks of the course, I acquired knowledge about various terms associated with physical fitness, such as activity, exercise, and sport. I gained an understanding of the distinctions between these concepts and their implications for overall health and well-being. Subsequently, we participated in surveys that evaluated our present physical fitness levels and potential health conditions that we might have. Initially, I felt anxious about the course activities, but I soon recognized that these initial assessments served as valuable tools to estimate our current activity levels and pinpoint areas in need of improvement.

The tests were conducted to help us understand our current physical state, and would not be graded, but will be used as a comparison for our progress at the middle and the end of the course, and this encouraged me to do practice outside the class time to improve my performance in the next time we do the same test. So, in a daily basis I started walking on campus instead of taking the bus, go do the grocery for my mom, and playing with the kids in the neighborhood. In terms of food, I started eating on a more organized basis and I tried to go to the gym three days a week, where I tried doing aerobic exercises that improve cardiovascular fitness. Prof. Lina taught us how to calculate our maximum heart rate, which is $(220 - \text{our age})$, and advised us to maintain a heart rate of 60-70% of the maximum heart rate during exercise. That helped me to keep an eye on my heart rate during the workout.

In addition, I felt thrilled when we were informed that we would not be studying in the regular classroom but in the sport hall instead. The excitement continued after we underwent the ALPHA-FIT battery test, which consisted of seven basic field tests representing key components of physical fitness for health and physical performance. These tests were designed to assess our current physical condition and wouldn't be graded, but rather used as a reference to track our progress throughout the course. This motivated me to practice outside of class to improve my performance in future tests.

On a daily basis, I started incorporating activities like walking on campus instead of taking the bus, running errands for my mom, and playing with kids in the neighborhood. I also adopted a more organized approach to my eating habits and aimed to visit the gym three days a week. During gym sessions, I focused on aerobic exercises that enhance cardiovascular fitness. Prof. Lina taught us how to calculate our maximum heart rate by subtracting our age from 220. She advised us to maintain a heart rate of 60-70% of our maximum during exercise, which helped me monitor my heart rate effectively during workouts. Due to my condition of Mediterranean anemia (thalassemia), I focused on low-impact aerobic exercises that enhance cardiovascular fitness without placing excessive strain on my body. These exercises were chosen to accommodate my specific needs and ensure that I can engage in physical activity safely and effectively.

One of the most challenging exercises for me during the course was using dumbbells during our workout sessions. It was the first time I truly felt the muscles in my upper abdomen or stomach engaging. This exercise pushed me out of my comfort zone and made me realize the importance of targeting specific muscle groups for a well-rounded fitness routine. Despite the initial difficulty, I embraced the opportunity to strengthen and tone my core, knowing that it would contribute to overall physical fitness and improved body strength.

Throughout the course, I used to feel frustrated whenever I experienced post-exercise soreness. However, Prof. Lina's encouraging words always lingered in my mind. She once said, "You'll appreciate these pains later on, as they signify that you've performed the exercises correctly." Her wise words helped shift my perspective, reminding me that the discomfort was a testament to my hard work and dedication. Instead of annoyance, I began to embrace the post-exercise soreness as a positive indicator of progress and a reminder of the effort I put into each workout.

Before taking the course, I had a fondness for sports like skating, but I didn't engage in them frequently. However, during the course, I reached out to my coach and expressed my desire to resume training. The decision to rekindle my involvement in skating brought me immense joy and a sense of fulfillment. I found myself thoroughly enjoying the activity and experiencing a heightened state of happiness. The course served as a catalyst for reigniting my passion for skating and reaping the physical and emotional benefits that come with it.

Finally, having learned various exercises and fitness techniques during the course, I made the decision to apply my newfound knowledge by integrating them into enjoyable workout sessions with my younger sisters. This will create a wonderful opportunity for us to bond while engaging in physical activities together. Witnessing their enthusiasm and progress will bring me immense satisfaction, as I will not only be benefiting myself but also positively influencing their health and overall well-being.