

What is the Role of Exercise in Weight Loss?

Barix Clinics

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Some people love it. Most people don't. Who has the time? Does it matter anyway? Here's the real scoop on exercise and weight loss and why you should find the time and motivation to make it work for you.



Weight Loss is Complicated

If only it were as simple as calories in and calories out, but it is not. Dieting is a battle between the mind and the body. The mind decides that excess weight is causing all kinds of health and emotional issues and needs to go. But, the body isn't on board with the mind's plan for weight loss. After all, that extra weight will help you survive the next famine. When calories are cut, the body fights back by:

- Reducing levels of leptin (the fullness hormone)
- Increasing levels of ghrelin (the hunger hormone)
- Slowing metabolism so calories are used more efficiently - an effect that can last for years
- Making food look and smell more enticing
- Reducing energy, increasing irritability, and keeping the mind fixated on food

Bariatric Surgery Tips the Scale in Your Favor

A tiny percentage of people lose weight and keep it off in the long-term with diet and exercise alone. Bariatric surgery disrupts the body's stronghold on obesity. It reduces food intake, but that is just the beginning. A host of physical and hormonal changes occur that significantly increase the odds of long-term weight loss.

Bariatric surgery works to overcome the body's resistance to weight loss. It is even more powerful when combined with regular exercise, a healthy diet, and other positive lifestyle habits.

Benefits of Losing Excess Fat

Bariatric surgery makes weight loss much more likely. Great - that's the goal. When excess fat is lost, a slew of benefits are gained, including:

- Better blood sugar/insulin regulation
- Lower risk of heart disease
- Lowered blood pressure
- Improved cholesterol levels
- Decreased risk of heart disease and stroke
- Reduced risk of certain cancers
- Improved mobility
- Reduced joint and back pain
- Decreased risk or improvement in symptoms of osteoarthritis
- Improvement of sleep apnea

Lose Weight, Lose Muscle?

But, when the body loses fat, it also loses muscle, and that's a problem. Muscle loss can have adverse effects, including:

- Reduced balance and increased risk of falls
- Decreased ability to walk and exercise
- A loss of heart tissue—remember the heart is a muscle too
- Increased risk of infections
- Poor insulin and blood sugar regulation
- A shorter life span—a higher ratio of muscle to fat improves life expectancy
- Slowed metabolism--muscle mass is the most significant factor impacting the rate at which your body burns calories

Look for Fat Loss, Rather than Weight Loss

The goal then is to maximize fat loss while minimizing muscle loss. Two behaviors can help accomplish this goal: 1) meeting daily protein goals and 2) getting regular exercise.

To meet daily protein goals:

- Eat six small protein-rich meals throughout the day.
- Eat protein first at each meal, balanced with small servings of vegetables, fruits, and whole grain.
- Obtain the majority of daily protein with lean meat/fish/poultry, low-fat dairy, and beans. Use protein supplements if unable to meet your protein goal with foods.

In addition to meeting daily protein goals, regular exercise is the other key to maximize fat loss and minimize muscle loss.

How Does Exercise Help Keep Muscle Tissue?

Muscle size increases when it is challenged with higher levels of resistance or weight. During exercise, muscle fibers are injured. The body repairs the damaged muscle fibers by fusing them, increasing their strength and size. Regular activity also enables the hormones needed for muscle growth to be more effective.

Other Health Benefits of Exercise

Regular exercise has benefits that go beyond weight control. It is incredibly good for mental health - reducing stress, anxiety, and improving outlook. It lowers the risk of many diseases - heart disease, diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, and some forms of cancer. The capacity for physical activity increases along with energy. Sleep improves.



Exercise helps us feel better and have more energy. Blood sugar and insulin levels are better regulated. Stress hormones decrease. The likelihood of making better food choices is improved. Regular exercise builds confidence, which then spills over to other aspects of life.

See how a foundation of regular exercise builds health?

How Much and What Kind of Exercise is Best?

Exercise needs to be consistent, challenging, and long-term to be most effective at maintaining or building muscle.

According to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans 2015 - 2020, adults should engage in muscle-strengthening exercises at least twice weekly.

Strength training activities include:

- Lifting free weights
- Using stationary weight machines
- Resistance band exercises
- Exercises that use body weight, such as pushups, squats, or lunges
- Strength training classes in person or on-line (check out YouTube)

Aerobic or “cardio” activity is vital for overall fitness and health too. It helps burn fat, especially dangerous belly fat. It also supports muscle growth and function. Adding quick sprints to your walk or job provides an interval workout, which is especially helpful in preventing muscle loss.

Current guidelines recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity each week. That’s just a 30-minute brisk walk five days each week. You can also combine strength building and cardio exercises – think kickboxing, circuit training, or pause the treadmill every 10 minutes for a set of squats or curls.

The Bottom Line

Maximizing fat loss and minimizing muscle loss is essential for long-term weight maintenance and overall good health. The winning combination to achieve this goal is bariatric surgery, regular exercise, and healthy food choices. They work together to create a change in body dynamics that tips the scale in weight loss’s favor. Hormones are helpful, metabolism is maintained, energy surges, and food cravings are minimized.

It is worth the time and effort to make regular exercise part of your daily routine. Your health depends on it.