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Good diet is not enough without this

Eating a clean predominantly plant based raw food diet is one of the best things you can do for your health. However, eating well is not enough if you want to realise your body, mind and spirit's full potential.

If you haven't done so already, finding an exercise regime which really works for you is almost as important as a balanced diet and like diet the choices for exercise can be overwhelming.

Simply put exercise prevents disease just as diet does. As an active person, you're less likely to develop cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis, have a stroke or get certain types of cancers such as colon and breast cancer. Like poor diet, physical inactivity is at epidemic levels in developed nations with more and more people doing sedentary jobs and then going home to sit in front of the computer or TV for hours on end. If you are doing the [Live Food Challenge](#) it is unlikely that you are one of these people, however, there may still be more you could do to improve your health and vitality so you are enjoying life to the maximum.

Even in the short term by exercising you will:

- Have healthier muscles, joints and bones
- Increase your metabolism
- Have more energy
- Experience a sense of well-being and be better able to cope with stress
- Be better able to get to sleep and stay asleep
- Be less likely to suffer from depression
- Increase your endurance

As there are so many types of exercise available we are first going to simplify exercise into 3 distinct forms, each of which has a different benefits for you body. Ideally your exercise regime will include all 3.

Aerobic exercise such as swimming, running, cycling or dancing increases your cardiorespiratory fitness and endurance. This is the capacity of your heart and lungs to supply oxygen-rich blood to your muscles so they can produce energy for movement over a sustained period. Many aerobic exercises are also great for getting your lymphatic fluid moving.

Flexibility exercises such as yoga, Pilates, qigong and tai chi improve the full range of motion of your muscles and joints.

Resistance exercise such as weight-lifting increases your muscle strength by requiring your muscles to lift, push or pull against something. This type of exercise can also increase bone density and help prevent osteoporosis, which is important as you get older.

The great news is there are so many effective forms of exercise available that you can hand pick a regime that suits your particular body type and temperament. As with diet we are all unique and discovering new forms of exercise can be a great exploration as well as lots of fun.

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Many health specialists say we need at least 20 minutes of high intensity or 45 minutes of medium intensity cardiovascular exercise at least 5 times a week. I personally perform and feel best with an hour or more of medium to high intensity exercise daily. If I don't do this I notice my energy isn't at its peak.

Another thing most experts agree on is that your exercise, at the very least, has to be moderately intense and has to be regular. The National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians recommends at a minimum 30 minutes of moderate physical activity – like walking – on most days of the week. How do you know if you're being moderately active? A good test is to see if you can talk easily while you're exercising. If you can, you are exercising at a light to moderate level. Once your breathing makes it too hard to talk, you know you've increased the intensity of your workout!

One thing to remember is that the longer and more intensely you exercise, the greater the benefit. Researchers have found a positive correlation between the length and intensity of physical activity and the reduction in risk of coronary events such as heart attack.

But even short periods of light exercise and daily activities are beneficial if you want to prevent obesity and diabetes. New research shows that sitting around for long periods of time can increase your blood glucose levels – even if you fit a 30 minute session of exercise in – so stay active and complement your 30 minutes of exercise with regular light activity.

If you haven't exercised for a while or you want to significantly increase your exercise level, it is advisable to speak with a health professional about designing an exercise plan. Many injuries are caused by exercising too much, too quickly, or by overuse.

Here are just a few different ways you can get the exercise you need.

1/ If you have the discipline you can get all of the exercise you need home pretty much for free.

Firstly you can do strength training with body weight exercises such as pushups, sit ups, squats, chin ups and many more. There are some great DVD's demonstrating what is possible just using your own body weight and household props such. Steve Cotters Encyclopaedia of Body Weight Conditioning DVD is one of the best. Some of these exercises will also get your heart pounding and are therefore aerobic as well. Another great home exercise program I have used is P90X which includes yoga, weights and cardio training.

Secondly, if you have a yoga, tai chi or chi gung routine you can get all of your stretching needs met without leaving the house.

Thirdly, for cardio you can jog, rebound, cycle or crank the stereo and dance, so as you can see it is all possible to cover all exercise bases from home.

The main benefit of exercising from home is that is free and you can do it when it suits you. The main drawback is that it requires a high level of discipline to follow through on a consistent basis.

2/ Another great option that most people have access to is the local gym. When you buy a 1 year membership the price per workout can be very reasonable. The benefits of the gym are that there are usually a wide range of activities and classes available which will more than cover all of your

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exercise bases. From free weights to weight machines, treadmills to cross-trainers and more. Most gyms also have a variety of classes including Body Pump which is great for muscle building, weight reduction and involves some good cardio, RPM bike classes which really get your heart rate up and burning calories, Body Balance which is a gentle stretching class based on yoga, pilates and tai chi. The other benefit of the gym is that you will usually receive some professional personal training instruction as part of your membership.

The gym has many benefits in that it offers great variety, it is not expensive if you go regularly, it is easier to be motivated when you are being pushed in a class or by a trainer and you can also meet plenty like minded people.

Other classes you may like to consider trying include yoga, qigong, tai chi or any other type of martial art. The major benefits of these ancient traditions is that they go beyond traditional exercise and are amazing tools for self exploration, deep relaxation and self healing. As they often incorporate awareness, visualisation and the breath you can use them clear energy blockages and stagnation within the body as well as for building flexibility strength and peace of mind.

3/ If you are lucky enough to live near water, kayaking is an awesome way to both exercise and connect with the earth. Runi and I leave our 2 man ocean kayak on our car and frequently go paddling in rivers, creeks dams and in the ocean after work – it is one of the most enjoyable forms of exercise I know.

4/ One last form of exercise I would like to mention here is dancing. Dancing can be great for flexibility, aerobic fitness and strength and not only that its lots of fun. The dance form that gives the most complete workout that I know of is ecstatic dance.

Ecstatic dance is often practised in a group or class setting and unlike many other forms of dance there are no steps, routines or performing on a stage. There is no special music and there is no right or wrong way to do it or experience it. There is absolutely no experience, fitness levels or age limit required. It is about expressing yourself truly in the moment through your dance and allowing whatever is there to be there. If you are angry you can dance that, if you are tired you can dance that, if you are afraid you can dance that, if you are joyful you can dance that.

It is based on the premise that our body has it's own wisdom and knowledge of how to move and express itself. While this ability is still evident in small children most adults lose touch with it as they are burdened with rules and responsibilities.

Perhaps the only rules of ecstatic dance are that it is drug and alcohol free and chatting is discouraged.

It is widely believed that humans have been dancing ecstatically since the beginning of time and there are many cultures today who still practice ancient and traditional styles of Ecstatic or Trance Dancing. Contemporary dance pioneers such as Gabrielle Roth have rediscovered this ancient practice and put it into a modern non- denominational context and made it available to all.

A 2 hour ecstatic dance session is usually a complete workout and many people discover that by the end of the session they are dripping with sweat and feeling, well, ecstatic and that is without taking any intoxicants at all.

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Ecstatic dance is now being widely practised in the USA and the UK and is quickly catching on in Australia. To find a class near you visit www.gabrielleroth.com or just try googling ecstatic dance and your city.

Did you know that both aerobic exercise and strength training has been successfully used in treating clinical anxiety and depression? One controlled trial found exercise training was as effective as antidepressant medication in older adults. I have noticed that it is almost impossible to remain in a negative state of mind while doing intense exercise. Many negative feelings rely on an unbroken train of negative thinking to stay alive. Often when we take our attention away from the thoughts for long enough they simply fade away. Intense physical exercise draws our attention out of our head and into our body and deep breathing tends to break up stuck thinking patterns. While ancient traditions such as yoga and qigong have been aware of the connection between breath and thought for thousands of years we are only just beginning to catch on in the West.

I have mentioned just a few of the different ways you can keep your body and mind in top shape. It is just a matter of getting out there and trying out some new forms of exercise and seeing what works for you.

If you haven't done so already I highly recommend that you create a weekly exercise plan and then stick to it. Do it whether you feel like it or not. Many people are stopped from achieving their goals in life by allowing momentary feelings to dictate whether they take action or not. The key to success is to let your goal or preferred outcome drive you – this way momentary feelings of inertia will rarely be able to stop you from getting out of bed, moving your body and achieving your dreams in life.

One last word about exercise: while most people do not do enough some people overdo it. The key is finding balance so if you are doing intense workouts make sure you allow enough rest and recovery times between sessions. If you are not sure about this, consult a trainer and in the words of a famous sports shoe brand, "just do it!" you won't regret it.

by Anand Wells, Live Food Education

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