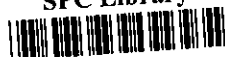


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EXERCISE

It's common knowledge that exercise is the answer to many health problems, but we also know it is easier said than done. Let's see just why exercise is good for us, and how we can 'get moving' and turn those good intentions into action.

What is exercise?

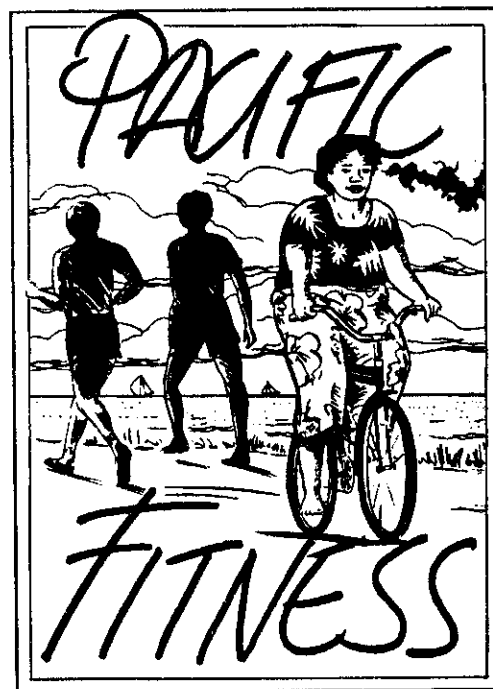
Exercise can take many forms in the Pacific Islands. Some traditional examples include walking to work, church or to visit relatives; fishing; rowing canoes; cutting grass and clearing land; gardening; playing team sports; traditional dancing; cooking with an earth oven; building a home, etc. In town areas, there are different kinds of exercise such as running or jogging, swimming, bicycling, aerobic dancing, lifting weights, using an exercise bicycle, etc.

Why is exercise good for us?

Exercise is an important part of a healthy lifestyle, and is essential for our physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Studies show that regular physical exercise helps the body work better. We look fit when we exercise. And if we are trying to give up cigarettes and lose weight, exercise is crucial.



Prevent disease: Exercise that makes our heart and lungs strong (aerobic exercise) helps reduce our risk of getting heart disease by



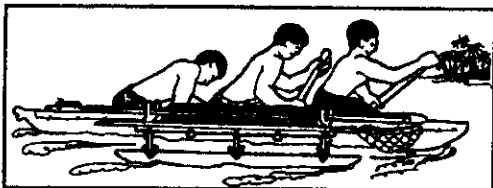
lowering blood pressure and increasing the amount of 'healthy heart' fatty acids (high density lipoproteins) in the blood. Exercise can reduce by half our risk of illness and death due to heart disease. In fact, studies show that the more you exercise, the better protected from heart disease you become, especially if the exercise is done regularly.

Moderate exercise (sweating and breathing hard for at least 20 minutes three or more times a week) can protect us from getting heart disease and reduces the chance of becoming seriously ill if we already suffer from it. Exercise, under a doctor's supervision, is an excellent treatment after a heart attack. A review of studies shows that exercise may reduce by 25 per cent the chance of having another heart attack or dying suddenly from heart failure.



Strengthen our bones: Exercise can help prevent our bones from getting weak and brittle as we age and is the preferred treatment (along with proper diet) for diabetes (too much sugar in the blood) and overweight. It is especially good for older women and can reduce the chances of falling or of breaking bones when we fall over. We lower our risk of getting diabetes by exercising regularly; diabetes patients who do regular exercise may be able to take smaller doses of medication or insulin.

Reduce our weight: For those of us trying to lose weight, exercise, along with a low-energy diet, will lose fat but not muscle. With dieting alone (no exercise), you usually lose both fat and muscle. Exercise also makes us feel good about our bodies and motivates us to exercise more.



So why don't we exercise?

Despite all this good news about exercise, backed up by scientific research, the fact is that very few people actually do it. As Pacific Islanders move into towns and urban areas, the level of exercise drops dramatically and we get unfit and sick. Statistics show that the inactive life in towns like Honiara, Majuro, Apia and

Suva is at the root of the problem, yet very little is done to make sure we get enough exercise in our daily routine. Here then is some help — a seven-point guide to exercising in the Pacific. **LET'S EXERCISE!**

How to start an exercise programme

Starting an exercise/fitness programme is easy. Any time is a good time to start. There are seven steps that may be followed in this programme, but don't worry if you are not doing all the steps listed below. The most important thing is to **START** exercising.

Step 1: Decide on your fitness goals

There are different types of exercise you can do, depending on your fitness goals. All fitness goals should include heart and lung fitness to protect you from heart disease. Some common fitness goals and exercises that can be used to meet them are listed below:

GOAL	EXERCISE
Reduce weight	run/jog, swim, dance
Heart/lung fitness	bicycle, walk
Increase stamina	outdoor work, sports
Build up muscles (arms, legs, back, etc.)	weight lifting, sit-ups push-ups, chin-ups
Good balance	dance, stretching
More agile	sports, tennis, etc.

Step 2: Make sure your body is ready for your fitness goals

You should have a medical check-up if you have any health problems or are over the age of 35. Exercising is very safe but some health problems like backache or heart disease can be made worse if too much exercise is done.

Step 3: Set fitness goals

Exercising is more fun when you have a goal — i.e. the level of fitness you want to reach and how long you will take to reach that level. You should aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise at least three times a week. If you are unfit, your fitness goals should be low until you get more fit.

Step 4: Choose an exercise programme

You should choose the type of exercise you like and when to exercise. Some people prefer sports, others fast walking or running, while still others may prefer outdoor work. Whatever your choice and fitness goals, you should include in your programme exercise to strengthen your heart and lungs.

As an example, fitness levels of exercises to strengthen your heart and lungs would be:

- ♥ **Low** Slow walking, volleyball, slow bicycling, cricket
- ♥ **Medium** Fast walking, fast bicycling, action dance, tennis
- ♥ **High** Running/jogging, swimming, soccer, rugby, bicycle or canoe racing



Step 5: Slowly increase the amount of exercise

It is important that you begin your exercise programme with easy exercise, then as you become more fit, increase the pace gradually and do more vigorous exercises.

Step 6: Exercise right

It is important with all exercise to warm up and cool down properly. Warm-up exercise is done for 3–5 minutes before the main exercise. Warm-ups usually involve stretching and light exercise to get your muscles moving, and help prevent muscle injuries. Cooling-down exercises are slow exercises like walking that are done for 5–10 minutes after the main exercise to allow the body to return to normal. This helps prevent muscle cramps and helps your body clean out waste products made during exercise. It is also important that you exercise for at least three days per week to get good results.

Let's go exercise

Now we know why exercise is good for us and how to start our own exercise programme. The missing ingredient is to go out and do it! It's always easier to do things with friends, so go find an exercise partner. Together you will help each other to keep exercising. Make sure you tell your partner how fit he/she is getting! And finally, remember — don't stop exercising — you need a month for your exercise programme to become a healthy life-long habit. From there it will be easy!



Resource materials

A variety of materials is available from the South Pacific Commission on the topic of exercise. Some popular ones with their cost are listed below:

Pacific Fitness exercise video
— US\$ 20 (indicate PAL/SECAM/NTSC);

Food, Drinks & Fitness nutrition book
— US\$ 8 including postage;

Be healthy — Be fit — Stay slim poster
— free within region.

To order these materials, please write to:

Community Health Services
South Pacific Commission
B.P. D5
Noumea Cedex
New Caledonia

Fax: (687) 26.38.18.

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