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Running or Walking to a Healthier You

Many of you have been running or walking as exercise for years; others may have just started, and still others are likely thinking about initiating an exercise program. Whether you are a seasoned runner/walker or a beginner, there are many benefits for both your physical and mental health. In fact, the American Health Association, World Health Organization and others recommend at least 150 minutes of aerobic activity each week. Here are a few of the key benefits to regular exercise:

1. **Weight loss-** The most obvious benefit of exercising is weight loss. Walking for 30 minutes can burn around 150-200 calories, depending on speed and incline. Running can double the number of calories burned. Weight loss can decrease joint pain as well. Every excess pound adds 3-5 pounds of force through each weight-bearing joint in your body. For example, if you are 10 pounds overweight, that's 30-50 pounds of extra force through your knees, hips and ankles!
2. **Increased life-span-** Extensive research into the connection between exercise and life-span concludes that aerobic exercise can contribute to a longer life due in great part to improved cardiovascular health.
3. **Improved physical health-** Exercise improves the overall function and efficiency of the heart and also can improve blood pressure control. After starting a running or walking program, many people have been able to decease blood pressure medications or stop them altogether. Exercise also may help prevent or reduce the severity of diabetes and pulmonary/lung problems. Some research even shows a connection between exercise and decreased cancer rates (colon, breast, prostate).
4. **Improved mental health-** Exercise can improve sleep and concentration and can lower levels of depression. Research has shown that people who ran for 30 minutes per day showed better daily function, slept better and had improved psychological function than those who did not exercise. Exercise also increases blood flow and the amount of oxygen flowing through the brain, which can improve memory and concentration.
5. **Improved bone health-** Walking and running can improve bone strength at the cellular level and, in turn, decrease rates of bony injury. Exercise can also increase Vitamin D levels, which are important to bone health.
6. **Decreased injury-** Aerobic activity not only builds strong bones, but it also increases muscle mass and improves flexibility of tendons, muscles and ligaments. This can lead to fewer injuries and more stable joints.
7. **Healthy aging-** Research has proven that exercise can delay cognitive/memory deficits (loss of brain function). As we age, exercise also helps us maintain mobility and independence.

If you have been exercising, keep up the good work. If not, it is never too late to start. Even a few minutes of daily exercise can begin to improve your overall health.

In my clinic, I see many people who ask what is best for them based on their current health. If you have concerns about exercising or injuries that are preventing you from exercising, please do not hesitate to reach out to one of our sports medicine physicians at Corewell Health Orthopedics at (616) 267-8860. You can also find more information about our

orthopedic program and providers on our website: https://www.spectrumhealth.org/patient-care/orthopedics.