



WellCare Newsletter

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COLD WEATHER FITNESS

Stay Healthy and Fit as the Mercury Drops

Even through our daily grind, it is always important to incorporate a regular workout regimen that allows for *at least 30 minutes of heart-rate elevating exercise three to four days per week.*

Kudos to those who already engage in such regular exercise; and for those who have yet to make the jump – do not be deterred by the shortening days or dropping morning temperatures.

For those engaging in fitness, seasoned and newcomers alike, the colder weather introduces a number of important considerations that, when heeded, allow good workout habits to continue through the holidays and into the New Year.

First by understanding how cold weather affects the body, we can see how to best prevent injury and enhance the quality of each workout. The soft tissues in the human body exhibit a viscoelastic quality – much like rubber, the soft tissues of the body become more prone to damage at cooler temperatures, with flexibility and durability increasing in hot temperatures and decreasing in cold.

In addition to exercise, the following tips apply to any strenuous cold-weather activity, such as shoveling snow or decorating for the holidays. It is also important to note that working out in a heated gym does not completely remove one from the hazards of cold weather – just a short walk from the car to the entrance of the gym is enough to introduce additional cold-weather risk:

- **Warm Up Versus Stretching** – Most experts agree that, especially in colder months, a low-intensity pre-workout warm up is the most effective way to increase circulation to soft tissues, and more effective and safer than starting with a stretch routine. Stretching a cold muscle is as dangerous as exercising a cold muscle. Instead, spend the first 10 minutes of your workout doing light aerobics or using resistance bands to work up your circulation – performing “lite” versions of the activity you are about to do.

- **The Safe Stretch** – Once warmed up, stretching is effective, if done properly. A safe stretch should feel relaxing and *never* hurt. You should hold each stretch for at least 20 seconds. Painful stretching or stretching for less than 20 seconds may initiate a “stretch reflex”, causing the muscle to tighten up even more. Additionally, perform each stretch only once, as over-stretching may weaken your muscles, and lend to further risk of injury.

- **Cross-training for the Weekend Warrior** – For those who engage in strenuous activities periodically (a weekly league, or shoveling the driveway as needed) it is important throughout the week to incorporate “cross-training” into your routine – performing exercises targeting muscle groups that aren’t targeted by your normal activity. For example, runners typically add an upper-body strength training session between weekly competitions, while basketball players add a swimming or yoga session to enhance flexibility. The practice of cross-training contributes to full-body fitness, and “fills the gaps” of traditionally one-sided workouts, decreasing the risk of injury and aiding performance.

continued next page



STRESS TIPS

Kick Stress to the Curb

When we need to perform our best, a moderate level of stress can help. Unfortunately, daily demands keep our stress levels too high for too long, resulting in unhealthy symptoms and effects. Consider these three tips and select those that work for your routine:

Common Scents Stress Relief

Aromatherapy can help reduce stress levels almost immediately. Orange and lavender scent extracts (recommended specifically for stress relief) are inexpensive, and can be found as incense, mixed as a food additive, and even absorbed through the skin through massage oils or hand lotions.

Enjoy the Warmth of Human Touch

While massage therapy from a massage therapist or chiropractor is a very effective method for reducing the physiological symptoms of stress, simple self-administered massage can also lower stress very quickly. For example, try applying light, circular pressure with your thumbs under your eyebrows, near the bridge of your nose to alleviate eye tension from computer monitor fatigue.

Consider the Counterfactual

Consider the negative counterfactual of a daily situation – an alternative outcome that might have left you in a worse position than you are in reality. With both a plausible positive and negative counterfactual to any situation, you can accurately assess your reality and address any illogical and stress-inducing feelings of regret.

These tips prove most effective when accompanied by a regular exercise routine, a healthy diet, and sufficient sleep each night. Let us know if you are having trouble sleeping or sticking to a healthy diet or exercise routine, because reducing stress levels starts with good practice in those three key areas of wellness.

Do Tough Economic Times Actually Promote Personal Wellness?

The lean times of economic recession may lead people to make healthier decisions promoting personal and family wellness, in order to counter rising healthcare costs and a bad economy, researchers say.

According to research conducted by Stanford University and the University of North Carolina, economic recessions, rather than booms (or to the other extreme – depressions), might be a blessing. People tend to drink less, smoke fewer cigarettes, and lose excess weight. Potential students on the fence in pursuing advanced degrees are more likely to leave the fulltime workforce and enroll in college. In general, our road habits become more frugal, the air becomes cleaner, and the roads are less crowded.

Alternatively, this same research illustrates that so-called prosperous times may not actually create healthier people or lead to happier families. In boom economies, people of all classes tend to take worse care of themselves and their loved ones. People eat out more, drink too much, eat more fat-laden food, and spend more time at work, away from their homes, hobbies and families.

One finding intrigued these researchers more than anything else: even as more people lose their health insurance and decrease their spending on prescription drugs and surgical procedures, society on the whole shifted itself into “self-wellness mode,” by adapting their lifestyle habits towards the healthy and frugal. In the process, some groups are becoming statistically healthier without defaulting to expensive prescriptions or invasive procedures.

Five Easy Tips Enabling Frugal Self-Wellness



In addition to the tips implied to the left (quit smoking; prepare your own, healthier meals; etc.), here are a few specific changes you can make among your daily habits to save money while staying healthy:

- **Opt for Whole Grains** – The high fiber content found in true whole grains (FDA recommends 25-30 grams daily) not only better regulates the digestive process, but also makes you feel fuller after eating less, therefore costing less in the end. Select foods labeled “whole grain” or that bear the small orange-on-black logo of the Whole Grains Council, and avoid breads and pastas with fewer than 1.0 gram of dietary fiber for every 15.0 grams of total carbohydrates.

- **Replace Coffee with Homebrewed Tea** – Store-brand tea bags cost as little as \$0.10 each and brew in less than five minutes while still providing a caffeinated boost with each cup. Along with a healthy dose of polyphenols and anti-oxidants, you also lose the sugar and sweetener typical with cafe-brewed coffee. Green tea specifically has been shown to promote an accelerated reduction of belly fat when paired with healthy eating habits.

- **Avoid Bottled Water – Purify Instead** – Chemical analysis of tap water and the most popular brands of bottled water show no health benefit gained (or detriment avoided) by opting for bottled water (which can cost 500 times more

than tap water). Instead, water experts either recommend the use of an at-home filtration system, a filtered pitcher or tap attachment.

- **Opt for Frozen Vegetables** – Frozen vegetables, ounce-for-ounce, are typically cheaper and healthier than their canned or fresh counterparts. Canned vegetables are usually too high in salt, while fresh vegetables lose vitamins and nutrients as they are exposed to light and air, arriving at the grocery store up to two weeks after harvest. Frozen produce is generally flash-frozen close to the source of harvest, thus retaining nutrients, and can last for months in your freezer, reducing waste.

- **Follow the Small-and-Often Rule** – Diet experts say that the key to maintaining a high metabolism and healthy weight is to eat smaller portions more often, recommending 4-5 smaller meals per day, spaced out by three hours, and that you stop eating before feeling full. Fitness experts echo the same sentiment, recommending three to four 30-minute fitness episodes a week vs. cramming two hours at the gym on a Saturday. Both tactics will keep your metabolism high all week long.

Try implementing one of these tips on the first Monday of each of the next five weeks, and let us know during your next visit how these small changes influenced your health and saved your wallet.

Cold Weather continued

- **When it is No Sweat** – Proper hydration is crucial, even in cold weather when we don't sweat quite as much. Although we can typically rely on our natural thirst-detecting mechanisms to stay hydrated, sensing dehydration is not as easy when we are in the middle of a tough workout or half-way done shoveling the driveway. For activities lasting over an hour, drink 15 ounces of water before exercise, followed by 15 to 30 ounces per hour of a cool sports drink both

during and after your workout. The reason for sports drinks as opposed to water-only: sports drinks contain fast-acting carbohydrates for energy and glucose along with a healthy, controlled dose of sodium, together required for high energy levels and proper muscle function while under stress.

- **Not in Cotton** – As far as clothing is concerned, especially if working outdoors, many make the cold-weather clothing mistake of opting for cotton. Warm when dry, cotton readily absorbs perspiration, keeping you cool in hot climates. In cold weather,

however, this absorbent property will leave you soaking wet, heavy-footed and of course, cold. Polypropylene, silk, polyester, Thermax, Thinsulate and wool are all good choices for your base layer (closest to the skin) for dry warmth during cold-weather activity.

Especially during the colder months, regular chiropractic care works to prevent injury related to strenuous activity while enhancing year-round performance, regardless of one's fitness goals.

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