

1962

EC62-1003 Exercise for a Lifetime

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EXTENSION SERVICE
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
University of Nebraska College of Agriculture
and U.S. Department of Agriculture
Cooperating
E. F. FROLIK, DEAN E. W. JANIKE, DIRECTOR

E.C. 62-1003

EXERCISES FOR A LIFETIME

Exercise is important to good health from the time you are born to the end of life. Even invalids and bed patients need body exercise as prescribed by the doctor, and often administered by the nurse or family members.

To the normal person exercise should be vigorous, but not necessarily fast. Yet it is painful, and sometimes dangerous, for a person who has been sitting down for ten or twenty years to start calisthenics without warning. It is just as foolish to try to get back in trim suddenly by an hour's gallop on horseback, or even by doing your gardening or housecleaning all at once.

Dr. Robert Wilkins, professor of medicine at Boston University School of Medicine, recently told an audience of heart specialists that he believed in graded exercises for everybody, starting with a little bit each day.

Before you start on any exercise program, it's a good idea to ask your doctor if you have some disease that rules it out. Actually, many physicians prescribe exercises even for the most incapacitating ailments, including heart disease.

You can do the following exercises - all very simple - as gently or as ruggedly as you need to.

Above all, don't try to conquer the world in a day. Start slowly. Follow these recommendations for your age group:

IF YOU'RE TWENTY, these exercises should give you no trouble. You can work this daily dozen as hard as you want to and get on to the variations as quickly as possible. But you have to keep doing them for the rest of your life; don't start and stop.

IF YOU'RE THIRTY, and you haven't done anything with your body for ten years, it's going to be painful. But in general you can work pretty hard with little danger.

IF YOU'RE FORTY, you have to take it slowly if you've been sitting for 15 years or so. Never work to the point of pain at the beginning. Pace yourself. After six months or so you can increase the tempo and work until it is slightly painful.

IF YOU'RE FIFTY, watch out. Don't kid yourself. Sure you can exercise, but one step at a time. Never work an exercise beyond comfort at the beginning. Take months and months to increase the rigor. In two or three years you can work to the point of pain, and you'll find yourself back in trim.

Above all, don't expect miracles after the first week or even after the first month. Like anything worthwhile, a trim, healthy body takes work and time.

Here are 10 exercises - most of them in three stages. The basic exercise is the one to begin with. Variation No. 1 is more difficult, to be used only after you've made progress. Variation No. 2 is more difficult and is for use only after you've gotten in pretty good trim.

Follow this principle of progressing from easy to hard versions of each exercise. Start with a few repeats - one, two or three, never more. Work up to ten over a few months. Go on to the variations, starting with two or three and work up. Don't try the variations until you can do the basic exercise in comfort. Rest as much as you need to between each set. As you get more and more into shape, you can rest less.

Exercise 1: Stand up straight. You can hold on to a chair for this one if you have to. Bend both knees slightly, keeping back straight. Straighten up. Work up to ten times.

Variation 1: Bend knees still more, always keeping back straight. When you straighten up, make sure heels are on floor. Work up to ten times.

Variation 2: Deep knee bends. Bend your knees, until heels come up off the floor, and you are in a crouch, but your back is straight as a ramrod. Come up, forcing heels to floor as soon as you can. Ten times.

Exercise 2: Walk in place with knees up high, as high as you can reach. Slowly work up to 20 times.

Variation 1: Run in place with knees up high. Work up to 20 times or one minute.

Exercise 3: Stand with feet together. Let arms and head hang toward toes, keeping knees stiff. Raise your back a bit and let it fall again toward toes. Bounce, bounce, bounce. Take it easy the first time. Keep track of the number of bounces. Start with three. Over the next few months, work up to ten

Variation 1: Make this exercise more vigorous by raising your back and arms higher and higher until on each bounce they are way over your head, and they come swinging down toward your toes.

Variation 2: Start with hands over head and as they come down in front of you, collapse your knees in a bent position. Sweep hands along floor, straighten knees and back. Bring arms up again. 10 times.

Exercise 4: Stand with feet apart and arms reaching out to the side (spread-eagled). Twist body all the way to the right and let arms follow, keeping them level, until they are at right angles to the line joining your feet. Twist one way, then the other. Work up to ten.

Variation 1: Twist right, but touch right toe with left hand. Straighten up. Twist left, touch left toe with right hand. Straighten up. Alternate. Start at two, work up to ten.

Variation 2: Twist right, reach way back with right hand toward the floor; then swing over forward and touch right toe with left hand. Straighten up. Twist left and repeat with opposite hand. Start with five and work up to ten, but slowly.

Exercise 5: Lie down on your back (on the floor - use a rug if you like). Stretch your arms back over your head, resting on floor. Raise right leg, lower it. Raise both legs, slowly lower them. Do one of each, if that's all you can do without pain. Work up to five of each raising and lowering. Take your time.

Variation 1: Increase the vigor of the exercise by trying to raise legs higher and lowering them more slowly. You will feel this in your abdomen, and it will tend to flatten a pot belly.

Variation 2: Raise right leg. Reach it as far to the right as you can and lower it, but not all the way to the floor. Sweep it across the floor toward other leg, which hasn't moved. Repeat up to four times. Do the same with other leg. Now both legs: raise, open legs wide, down, and sweep together. Also try reversing this exercise; reaching leg to one side along floor, raising it, bringing it vertical, and then lowering.

Exercise 6: Lying on back, bring arms down along sides. Raise legs off floor far enough so there is no tunnel under small of back. Raise arms about three inches off floor too. And raise head off floor. Now move arms up and down in pumping motion, counting to yourself. Beginners do it only a few times until you feel just a little bit uncomfortable. As you advance over the months, pump faster and longer. In a year or so, you should be counting up to 100 pumps.

Variation 1: Instead of pumping arms, pat your abdomen. This will tighten abdominal muscles even more. Fighters and wrestlers pound with their fists, but this isn't necessary unless you're going to get into the ring with Sugar Ray Robinson.

Exercise 7: Lying on back, bring legs up so they form an L with your body. Try lifting buttocks a little off floor. Use hands to push, if you need help. Lower legs slowly but keep head on floor. This is prelude to shoulder stand. You should be able to do about five of these before trying the next variation.

Variation 1: Lift back all the way off floor with legs pointed at ceiling. Arms are flat on floor. Lower legs slowly. Don't bang your back. Use a rug. Keep head on floor. Four times.

Variation 2: Reach legs way back over head after your back is up. Try to touch floor with toes over your head. Bring legs back and lower them as before. Take it easy while working up to four times.

Variation 3: (For experts only.) Reach your legs over right shoulder. Swing them forward to about two inches off the floor, circling back to reach them over left shoulder. Lower legs slowly. Repeat the other way. Four times.

Exercise 8: Lie on stomach, arms stretched out in front of you. Raise arms, head, and thighs (plus toes) off floor in one effort; relax. Work up to four such efforts, stretching upward as much as you can each time.

Variation 1: Try it with arms spread-eagled.

Variation 2: Reach back with arms, bend knees, and grab ankles. This is not easy and don't try it until you have been working at least several months. Then pull on ankles and lift head in one effort; relax, but don't let go. Work up to four times.

Variation 3: (For the expert.) Bend knees, cross calves, reach back with hands, and grab ankles again. Then pull up on ankles and lift head in one effort; relax, but don't let go. Work up to four times.

Exercise 9: Sit up on floor with legs stretched out in front. Reach over with hands and try (not too hard) to touch toes. Straighten up. Once or twice will do for beginners. Work up to ten times, reaching more toward toes.

Variation 1: (Only after you can touch your toes every time.) Reach over and grab the soles of feet, hanging on for a couple of seconds. Let go and straighten up. Work up to five times. If you have trouble doing them even after you can touch your toes, try this: put the soles of feet together, hold ankles and bounce head toward toes. In a couple of years, your head will reach your toes.

Exercise 10: Lie down on back, arms stretched way back. You're going to sit up. To help yourself, swing arms forward toward toes. After you've sat up, lower yourself slowly toward floor. Work up to ten times. You may have to catch your toes under a bed or chair. (If you have trouble doing even one sit-up, start in sitting position and lower body to floor. Don't strain. Then sit up again, using hands on floor if necessary. Lower body again slowly. After a few months, you'll be able to sit up without trouble.

Variation 1: After you can sit up easily, try raising your body, but slowly this time, without swinging arms to help. Then, in lowering, pull your abdomen in, round your back, and lower slowly. Work up to ten times.

Variation 2: (For experts) Clasp hands behind head, catch toes under the bed or a chair, and raise body off floor. Don't jerk up. Raise yourself smoothly. Then lower slowly with a rounded back. Work up to ten or fifteen times.

This is just one daily dozen. There are many others that are favored by individual teachers and physical culturists. They are probably roughly equal. But the one important thing is to start slowly and work slowly until you achieve stamina. You can pull a muscle or a tendon by trying to win an Olympic medal the first week.

Exercise alone will not slim you down, either. You must combine it with a reducing diet. However, if you do the "daily dozen" vigorously for about a half hour each day, you can deduct 100 to 200 calories a day. It will depend on how hard you work - and how consistently.

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