

Waisting away for health

FITNESS EXPERTS at Harvard School of Public Health ran a 12-year study that concluded we need to combine both kinds of physical activity – aerobic, like running; and anaerobic, ‘resistance’ or specifically, weight training – for healthy weight loss.

On Monday January 4, 2016 (Radio National *Health Report*) Norman Swann spoke to the lead researcher, who is also a physical exercise teacher.

She said:

When you run the major energy source comes from fat – because fat can ONLY BE BURNED aerobically, that is, in the presence of oxygen.

So you lose fat when you run (or walk vigorously, jog, cycle, swim etc.) You also lose a little glycogen.

Glycogen is a storage carbohydrate, largely present in the liver, and it is pulled down to provide quick energy when you need it for vigorous exercise.

Weights

When you perform anaerobic activity, as with resistance work like weight-lifting, glycogen is the main source of energy used.

The Harvard study focused on ways of reducing weight and, more importantly, waist circumference. The latter is the most significant factor in heart disease and diabetes, said Dr Norman Swann

This applies especially to seniors. As we age, because there is a decrease in skeletal muscle mass. As a result there is an increase in fat mass.

So if you find a small decrease in weight, it is not necessarily as good as you might think.

A decrease in waist circumference is a better indicator because it is an indicator of reduced visceral or abdominal fat around the intestines.

Why does weight training reduce visceral fat?

Over six months or so of increased exercise, muscles will adapt.

You will have more mitochondria in the muscles. These ‘little energy factories in the cells’ make the muscles better able to burn off lipids, or fats.

Which makes your aerobic work more effective.

Also, some weights work can get you puffing, so then you are combining both kinds of exercise, aerobic and anaerobic.

Over the 12-years study researchers compared people who did moderate, or heavy, aerobic training with those who did weights.

They found that 20 minutes daily of weight training did more for reducing waist measurement than 20 mins of running, etc.

Increasing waist size is inevitable for most of us with age; but people who did weights counteracted the increase more efficiently.

Best bet?

Researchers say they aren’t knocking aerobic activity, but on its own it is not enough.

People who combine both kinds of activity achieve best results.

If you do NO aerobic work – i.e. running – you need 25 minutes or more weights daily.

If you already do both kinds, up to 20 minutes weights per day is enough. More doesn’t make much difference.

Losing weight

Bear in mind that pure weight loss is likely to be greater if you just go aerobic.

But in general a quarter of every kilo lost will be muscle, the researchers say.

They suggest it is far more important to reduce the waist, and therefore the visceral fat, than to reduce overall weight.

You might shed fewer kilos, but waist reduction is more vital for health.

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