Exercise lets you build muscle and use it to lose weight: a NetWellness column

By Plain Dealer guest columnist

January 27, 2010, 8:15AM

A common concern when exercising to lose weight is whether to focus on aerobics or strength-training. Each type of exercise has its perks, but neither should be used exclusively. Most professionals advise that a combination of both would be best.

Aerobic exercise

Besides burning fat, aerobic exercise:

- Helps your heart
- Reduces risk of diabetes
- Boosts bone density and mental health

Aerobic exercises include activities such as:

- Brisk walking
- Jogging
- Swimming
- Biking
- Aerobic dancing

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This week's NetWellness column is authored by Jackie Buell, director of sports nutrition in the Department of Human

They are those that use the body's large muscle groups in continuous, rhythmic movements and require you to expend energy.

Getting started

If you're not accustomed to regular aerobic exercise, the best way to start on that path is to find something you enjoy, and start by doing it at least three times a week. If you enjoy the exercise, whether a power walk around the neighborhood with a friend or an aerobics video that gets your heart pumping in the privacy of your own living room, you'll be more likely to keep up with the program.

Work yourself up to at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity on most days, and then eventually to 60 minutes daily. If you can't find that big of a chunk of time to devote to exercise, break it up into 30-, 20-, or even 10- minute segments. A longer period of sustained exercise is best for heart health, but any aerobic exercise will be beneficial for weight loss.

Set a goal to get 30-60 minutes nearly every day. Build endurance gradually -- progression is the name of the game.

Strength training

Although aerobics are important for tipping the energy balance in favor of weight loss, strength training is also extremely important. But if you're not accustomed to working with weights, start slowly and find a program you like. Whether that means joining a gym or buying a set of weights to use at home is up to you. Again, the key is finding something you like so you will actually do it.

Hazards of yo-yo dieting

Weight training while dieting helps preserve your lean mass (muscle) and helps stimulate your metabolism. This should assist in losing weight. Without weight training while dieting, you'll likely lose about one pound of lean body tissue (muscle) for every three pounds of body fat lost when dieting. The thing is, muscle burns more calories than fat. So when you lose muscle, you lose some of your body's natural ability to burn calories.

If you begin to gain weight after a period of weight loss (that nasty yo-yo syndrome), the weight you gain will likely be 100% fat. That, in turn, will decrease your body's muscle ratio even more. This will make it even easier to pile on the pounds and more difficult to lose them.

In order to maximize both weight loss and health, a balance between aerobic and strength-training exercises is important. Find something you like doing, and keep at it each day!
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