

Waste your body energy



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Government health recommendations say we need at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic physical activity each day. Excellent advice, but if you suffer from diabetic complications or other health problems that amount of time might be difficult to achieve?

Even if you were able to achieve 30 minutes of activity a day, what about the other 23½ hours?

Survival of the fittest

Our ancient caveman ancestors spent long periods of time and enormous energy each day hunting, gathering, and fighting or fleeing predators. When no food was available, the body stored fat which enabled them to survive the lean times.

Now it's a case of "survival of the fittest" in the Darwinian sense of those who are most successful in adapting – physically, socially and technologically – to their environment. We must adapt to the physical and social surroundings we live in, which have been transformed from the food scarcity environments our hominid forebears encountered more than 12,000 years ago.

Today, the longest lived are likely to be those who manage their food quality and calorie intake, maintain a healthy lifestyle, including good relationships and interactions with family and friends. Genes certainly also have a part to play.

Regular physical activity – including cardio-vascular aerobic activity, stretching, and weight resistance – is also a key element in maintaining a healthily functioning body.

Exercise vs physical activity

Is there a difference between exercise and physical activity? Structured exercise isn't the only physical activity option for improving your health.

We now have evidence to support the practical value of incidental low-level physical activity. Numerous health benefits – including lower blood sugar levels – are associated with reduced sitting time and greater emphasis on performing activities of daily living, such as household chores (e.g. washing dishes, mopping the floor, or gardening). The trick really is to "waste" your energy at every opportunity.



Ways to 'waste' your energy – gardening, lawn-mowing, walking



Activate your 'sugar sponges'

Benefits of incidental activity on blood sugar control may be partially explained by the presence of GLUT4 transporters in the muscle. These are like little sugar sponges in the muscle that become active with muscle contraction and help lower blood sugar.

Upright, gravity-bearing movements such as walking place stress on the muscles which forces these "sponges" to work for you – and they don't require insulin for activation. Regular physical activity improves the function of the muscle at the cellular level and helps "re-sensitise" muscle to the effects of insulin.

We have evidence to show that people with diabetes who perform regular physical activity can still see improvements in both body composition and blood sugar control, even without weight loss. Focus on maintaining a healthy lifestyle, feeling good, and using your bathroom scales just once or twice per week.

Take home message

The fat-storing biology which helped keep our ancestors alive now threatens to kill or maim us if we don't manage it.

Physical activity is medicine. You can control your blood sugar and improve overall health with regular physical activity as part of a comprehensive diabetes management regimen.

Remember, every bit of movement counts. ●