



Mid America MS Achievement Center News

Exercise- JUST DO IT!

By Shannon Lepper - Physical Therapist

One goal that all participants in the MSAC have is to start and maintain some type of exercise program. While this may seem like a simple goal for many to achieve, it can be difficult for others. Many people find it difficult to find the type to exercise that they are able to do or find a type of exercise they enjoy. It also can be difficult to keep exercising if you don't feel yourself getting stronger. If one can overcome these barriers to exercise, a person with MS may reap many benefits..

We all know that exercise can improve your cardiovascular fitness, but few people make the connection that exercise can improve your fatigue level. Because fatigue is one of the common reasons people with MS do not exercise, it is important to realize that even brief periods of exercise can improve your fatigue throughout the day. Once you start your exercise, it should be performed 3-5 times a week, or at least never miss exercising two days in a row. And while an exercise program might be fatiguing, you should be able to feel normal again 2 hours after you exercised. If not, you have done too much. Another important factor when starting an exercise program is that for most people with MS you can not save up energy for the next day and if you work too hard you won't get any energy back. It is therefore important that people learn to exercise for as long as they can, with out over fatiguing. This means that some people may be able to exercise for 5-10 minutes each time and some may tolerate 1 hour. Every person must learn to gauge themselves and it may take some time to figure out what works the best for you. But once a program has been established, most people will see their fatigue level improve.

Another important benefit of exercise is increasing strength and flexibility. And while these are obvious benefits to most of us, it can be more important to someone with MS. Improving flexibility can be vital in maintaining your ability to get around.

Keeping muscle strength and bulk can help prevent skin



breakdown for people who spend a lot of time sitting. One reason that people often quit exercising is that they don't see their strength improving. But it is extremely important to maintain as much strength as possible to assist in maintaining independence.

Other important benefits of exercise are improving cognitive functioning, improving depression, improving body image, reducing pain and improving reaction times.

One common barrier to exercise that many people feel, is that they aren't able to perform traditional exercise programs. But any type of exercise is good. Some people swim, others may be able to walk short distances, and some are able to perform wheelchair aerobics. All the participants in the MSAC are given an exercise program they perform while sitting in a chair or wheelchair which includes stretching, strengthening, and cardiovascular fitness. And all participants work at their own level. There is almost always something you can use without buying fancy equipment.

If just knowing that exercise is good for you isn't enough to get you going, hopefully improving your ability to move or improving your fatigue level may get you going. Just remember if you haven't exercised for a long time, you should get a physician to clear you for exercise and there is always some type of exercise you can do. So Just do It.