

Fitness for the student body

Late night studying, last minute assignments, and exam preparations are all common occurrences in college that leave no room for exercise. Nevertheless, physical activity can become part of a student's daily routine without having to be time consuming.

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BESIDES THE OBVIOUS benefits of looking and feeling better, exercise can boost concentration levels, and help overcome the symptoms of stress.

Since time is the most common barrier for not exercising, a plan must be in order. A healthy lifestyle is achieved by making better choices, and turning them into lifelong habits. Therefore, the first step is to write down five bad habits and replace them with five healthy habits. For example, a bad habit could be choosing to watch television on your study break. Instead, form a healthy habit and go for a walk. Here are a few other examples.

Bad Habits...

1. Always taking the elevator, driving to the destination and not being active enough
2. Staying up late with friends every night
3. Drinking soda and eat chocolate everyday
4. Smoking shisha or cigarettes

It's chemical!

There is an indisputable link between exercise, mood, and brain function. When you exercise, you feel better. And this effect is purely chemical. During periods of stress, the body produces cortisol, a hormone that breaks apart tissue for energy. Over time, mental and emotional stress can make everything in life seem more difficult. Fortunately, there is a hormone called endorphin that reduces the level of cortisol and counteracts its negative side effects. Endorphins are released in response to exercise and an elevated heart rate, which in turn enhance a person's mood.

Replace with Better Habits...

1. Take the stairs instead of the elevator and walk briskly between classes
2. Get to bed early during school nights
3. Drink more water and eat baby carrots and other veggies as a snack instead. Limit chocolate to once a week.
4. Quit altogether or reduce by smoking only half of the cigarette



Exercise also increases serotonin in the brain, another chemical that helps a person feel good and helps calm the nerves down during periods of stress. So in light of these facts, it makes sense to get your body re-acquainted with physical activity and reap the benefits of exercise! Just remember that some physical activity is better than none, and every little bit counts.

5-minute chair exercises while studying

1. Gluteus Squeeze (targets the bum)

Step 1: While sitting in your chair, tighten and squeeze the gluteus muscles (a.k.a. bum). Hold the position for 10 to 15 seconds and slowly release. Repeat the exercise 10 times.

2. Isolated Squats (targets the upper thighs)

Step 1: In a sitting position, place both feet flat on the ground and slightly lean forward at the hips.

Step 2: Push up from the chair with the upper thigh muscles, and keep the knees bent so that there is still contact with the chair (i.e. do not stand up). Hold the position for 10 to 15 seconds. Slowly return to sitting position, and repeat 5 times.

3. Seated Calf Raises (targets the calves)

Step 1: In a sitting position, place both feet flat on the ground. Lay a heavy text book (preferably not the one you are studying from)

on your lap and over the knees.

Step 2: Lift both heels off of the floor simultaneously so that only the balls of the feet are touching the ground. Slowly return to start position and repeat as many times as needed to feel a slight burn in the calf muscle.

4. Upper Body Lifts (targets the upper arms and shoulders)

Step 1: In a sitting position, place your hands next to your thighs on the seat of the chair. Your fingers should be facing forward, and your elbows bent. If your chair has side-arms, place your hands on the arm-rests instead.

Step 2: Slightly lean forward from the hips, and lift your body off of the chair by straightening the elbows. Make sure to use the muscles of the upper body and not the legs when raising the body. Slowly lower the body to start position and repeat 10 times.

Tip: Never lock the joints; always keep a slight bend in the elbows.

10-minute study break exercises

It is important to recharge the mind and body by taking frequent study breaks.

The following stretches and exercises take minimal time to perform and are very effective.

1. Full-Body Stretches

Step 1: Standing tall with your arms by your sides, tilt the head to one side (ear to

shoulder) and hold for 8 seconds. Repeat on the other side.

Step 2: Standing tall with your arms by your sides, make full circles to the back with the shoulders. Repeat 8 times and reverse the direction.

Step 3: Stand with your feet apart and arms raised perpendicular to the floor (star position). Gently bend to one side to feel the stretch along the side of the torso. Hold for 8 seconds and repeat to the other side.

Step 4: Standing tall with your feet together, bend at the waist and try to touch your toes without bending the knees. You will feel the stretch at the back of the legs and knees. Hold for 8 seconds and return to start position. Repeat 3 times.

2. Stair Runs

Find a set of stairs that is not frequently accessed, and run up and down for 3 minutes. Listen to your body as this exercise can really get your heart racing. If a flight of stairs is not accessible, then any step can be used as long as it is solid and secure.

3. Brisk Walking & Jogging

Next, determine a safe walking and jogging destination. It is fun to alternate between a brisk walk and jog by setting mini landmarks along the way. For example, decide to walk briskly to the garbage can, and then jog to the next lamp post, and so on. Perform the exercise for 5 minutes or more if time permits.

10-minute bedtime exercises

After a long day at school, jump into bed and get in another quick workout before turning off the lights. Remember, a little goes a long way, so keep active.

1. Lying Hamstring Lifts (targets the back of the thigh)

Step 1: Lie on your back with your arms by your side and knees bent. Palms of the hands are facing down; feet are flat on the bed and hip-width apart.

Step 2: Lift your hips straight up, hold momentarily while squeezing your bum, lower and return to start position. Repeat 20 times. Rest for 10 to 15 seconds and repeat another set of 20 repetitions.

2. Crunches (targets the stomach)

Step 1: Lie on your back with your arms crossed on your chest and knees bent.

Step 2: Raise your shoulders slightly off of the bed. Hold for 2 seconds, and slowly lower to start position. Repeat 20 times. Rest for 10 to 15 seconds and repeat another set of 20 repetitions.

Tip: Keep your chin off of your chest as you raise your shoulders off of the bed!

3. Side lying leg raises (targets the outer hip and thighs)

Step 1: Lie on your side with both legs in line with each other.

Step 2: Raise the top leg towards the ceiling while keeping the foot parallel to the floor (lead with the heel, not the toe). Lower the leg back down and repeat 20 times. Rest for 10 to 15 seconds and

repeat another set of 20 repetitions. Switch sides and repeat with the opposite leg.

4. Side lying inner leg lifts (targets the inner thighs)

Step 1: Lie on your side with both legs in line with each other. Bend the top leg, and place it in front of your other leg so that the bottom leg is free to move upwards.

Step 2: Raise the bottom leg up towards the ceiling while keeping the foot parallel to the floor (lead with the heel, not the toe). Lower the leg back down and repeat 20 times. Rest for 10 to 15 seconds and repeat another set of 20 repetitions. Switch sides and repeat with the opposite leg.

5. Superman (targets the upper back, lower back & shoulders)

Step 1: Lie on your stomach with

your face down on the bed. Arms are stretched out by your ears.

Step 2: While keeping your head face down on the bed, raise both arms and legs simultaneously. Hold momentarily, and lower both the arms and legs back down. Repeat 20 times. Rest for 10 to 15 seconds and repeat another set of 20 repetitions.

Tip: If you have lower back problems, lift the opposite arm and the opposite leg simultaneously instead of lifting both of the arms and legs together.

Note: Always consult with your physician before beginning an exercise program or suddenly increasing activity levels.

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