



'Tis the season to be healthy

Welcome to PhysioBiz, with healthcare advice and information you can trust and rely on, brought to you by the South African Society of Physiotherapy!

“Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents,' grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.”

(Little Women, Louisa May Alcott)

We know the feeling, don't we. Whether we normally celebrate Hanukkah (10 December this year) or Christmas, if we head for home to see Gogo or just enjoy a chance to kick back with friends and family, 2020, tough as it's already been, is not going to end with a normal festive season. With surges happening in key holiday destinations like the Eastern Cape, Ballito and the Garden Route, responsible South Africans will be keeping gatherings as small as possible, travelling as little and as carefully as they can, and doing it all in masks, outside.

“Precisely because it's not a normal year and a normal holiday season, we would urge you to prioritise exercise,” says Rogier van Bever Donker, President of the South African Society of Physiotherapy (SASP). “Exercise will help you cope with the end of 2020.”

Top three reasons to make exercise a priority this December

- **Stress relief.** The end of the year is commonly stressful as families gather (and argue!) amid high expectations. This year we may find ourselves missing and mourning the big family occasions; we're also coping with the stress, economic and otherwise, of this endless stretch of precautions, restrictions and anxiety. All that stress triggers production of stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, and exercise does an amazing job of reducing them. At the same time, it

stimulates the body's famous 'feel-good' brain chemicals, the endorphins widely known for producing a 'runner's high'.

It looks, from a 2020 study, as though exercise also boosts the brain's resilience to stress by raising levels of the neuromodulator galanin, a protein important to stress and mood.

- ***A boost for the immune system.*** A growing body of research indicates that regular exercise improves immune system function and response to pathogens like viruses. People who engage in just 'moderate exercise' have less risk of illness; and we know that exercise has an anti-inflammatory effect. One study published in July this year says that "...there is evidence of lower rates of ARI [acute respiratory infections] incidence, duration and intensity of symptoms and risk of mortality from infectious respiratory diseases in individuals who exercise..."
- ***A help for troubled tummies.*** We may not be able to have the gatherings we're used to at this time of year, but we're going to have a celebratory meal... or two... or three... aren't we? And the food we're eating will be 'lekker food', with sauces and big doses of sweet things and festive excess that often leaves us bloated and uncomfortable. "Regular exercise can help keep stool moving through the colon," notes an article from Johns Hopkins University's website, pulling no punches. "Exercise helps tone the gut muscles, both inside and out," says van Bever Donker, "so people who are active tend to have tummies that work a bit better."

What does 'exercise' or 'activity' mean?

Moderate activity will do the trick – no need to go all out and train for Iron Man! 150 minutes a week is the usual recommendation: walking, gardening, dancing, swimming, cycling, a gentle hike or a game of fetch with the dog all qualify.

If you've been inactive for a while (and who hasn't had patches of inactivity this year?) you may have some concerns about discomfort, old injuries flaring up, muscle pain or troublesome joints. Consult your physiotherapist for guidance on how to get going without problems.

Go to www.saphysio.co.za to find a physiotherapist.

References

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