

"PUMP IT UP"

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This month's article is devoted to one of the most important, if not **the** most important muscle in the body...the heart. Many of us fail to realize that like every other muscle, the heart must be nourished and exercised in order to be strong and healthy. The way you treat your heart today will in great part determine your quality of life for years to come.

In order to stay healthy and functional, your heart and circulatory system need regular exercise. Lack of exercise and a sedentary lifestyle degrade the quality of the circulatory system, weaken the heart and lungs, and lead to the overall decay of physical health. One of the best ways to prevent this decay is through cardiovascular conditioning.

Simply stated, cardiovascular exercise is any activity that raises and holds the heart rate up while increasing blood circulation. In order to achieve the greatest benefits, most fitness professionals agree that your target heart rate (THR) needs to be at 70 to 80 percent (50-60% for seniors) of maximum heart rate (MHR) for a period of 20 minutes or greater. The simple formula for calculating THR is 220 minus your age which equals your MHR. You then multiply MHR by .7 or .8 to get your THR. For example, if you are 40 years old, your MHR would be 180bpm (220-40). To calculate your target heart rate, multiply 180 by .7 and .8, giving you a THR between 126bpm and 144bpm. You will notice that in the beginning stages of cardiovascular conditioning, not much intensity will be required to achieve your THR. However, as your heart health improves, you will need to increase your intensity or duration of activity to achieve similar results. It is important to note, you should always consult with your physician before beginning any type of fitness program. Also, don't forget your 8-10 minute warm up, 5-10 minute cool down and hydration, all very important steps when exercising!

"So what's in it for me?" you might ask. The most obvious answer and the number one reason people engage in cardio fitness is weight loss and fat reduction. However, what many of them don't realize is that they are reaping a myriad of other benefits which are vital to health. Some of these tremendous benefits include increased lung function, increased production of endorphins which give us feelings of happiness and well-being, better utilization of oxygen throughout the body, increased metabolism, increased bone and muscle mass, improved ability to recover from injury or illness, increased ability of the muscles to utilize glucose which is key in managing diabetes, decreased risk of heart disease, lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and stress reduction. All of this for 20 minutes at your THR three to five times a week. Well worth it in my book!

So whether by walking, biking, swimming or hiking, pump it up! Choose activities you find fun, that you can do with your family or friends, and make time! Your heart will thank you!