

Exercising Safely, by Kelly Gordon

When you hear the word 'exercise' - what do you think about? If you have suffered with low self esteem or an eating disorder, exercise can have connotations of weight loss, secrecy and isolation. However - just as recovery can help you to look at food in a new light, exercise can be a safe way to maintain your overall health as well.

The key with exercise is to break any potential habits that can push the boundaries of obsessive or compulsive exercise; don't see it as a punishment or trial to burn calories but as a way to unwind, relax your mind and focus on yourself.

A lot of people choose to exercise alone, however this is not perhaps the best method for people in recovery as support is needed to ensure a safe return to full health. Class or group activities provide a setting to socialise and have a laugh with other members - this will also boost your confidence so you concentrate more on enjoying the exercise instead of worrying how much you have done.

Look at the types of exercise available in your local leisure or community centres, not only are there always classes that can fit around your weekly schedule but you can explore a huge range of options that perhaps have never occurred to you before. By taking up different activities you have the benefit of working out different areas of your body as well as being stimulated by new challenges which you can share on your My Personal Best profile!

Instead of high intensity workouts which have you gasping for breath and close to collapse, why not try the wide range of low impact activities which, according to research, is just as good for fitness and well being as high impact sports - but without the risk of serious injury. Some examples of these are...

- ⑩ Walking - the easiest and most accessible form of keeping fit, take the dog, take your mum ... it's good for everyone and you can vary the pace and location to keep your body muscles guessing.
- ⑩ Swimming or aqua aerobics - You use all your muscles when swimming so it is great for all over toning and keeping fit.
- ⑩ Yoga - A well known method to relax and de-stress! It focuses on breathing technique, strength and balance.

⑩ Pilates - Much like yoga, it helps to improve your core strength (stomach muscles), balance and flexibility through different postures; it can incorporate cardio work in some routines.

⑩ Cycling - A very good aerobic exercise that works the lower body; find scenic routes with friends, take a camera or picnic and make a day of it!

It is important to remember that you shouldn't exercise too much - over exercising can cause multiple health risks and the aim here is to feel good and energised, not fatigued and in pain! Some of the most common risks are:

⑩ Permanent damage to bones, joints, ligaments and muscle

⑩ Irregular or non-existent periods

⑩ Infertility

⑩ Osteoporosis (loss of bone density)

⑩ Infection, exhaustion and strain on the heart.

There is no need to exercise everyday, in fact your body won't thank you for it as it needs time to heal and repair, you must listen to what your body is telling you and not worry about having the odd pamper/movie/duvet day instead!

Written by: Kelly Gordon

Web sites used: <http://www.disordered-eating.co.uk/disordered-eating/compulsive-exercise.html> (accessed 29/05/11)

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/Lowimpact.aspx> (accessed 29/05/11)

<http://www.b-eat.co.uk/Home> (accessed 29/05/11)