



LESSON 22: "THE IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISE"

If you're already an avid athlete or just a very active person in general, the idea that exercise is important won't be new to you at all, but if you're the kind of person who has a hard time even getting off the couch at times or just finding the motivation to workout consistently, then this lesson is for you.

Why exercise is so important

- It helps you get in shape or stay in shape and feel fit
- It lowers the risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, osteoporosis and certain cancers.
- It reduces and/or helps control stress
- It improves sleep quality
- It's a mood booster (In his book *The Instinct to Heal*, late psychiatrist David Servan-Schreiber describes how after comparing the effect of drugs like Prozac with the effect of exercise (running and Yoga amongst others), he was astonished to see that exercise triggered a similar or sometimes even more intense response than drugs).
- It reduces the risk of falling and improves the cognitive function in older adults

What kind of exercise is best for you?

When it comes to the kind of exercise you should choose, there really is no "one size fits all" answer as we're all different. The most important factor to take into consideration is fun. If you don't enjoy it, chances are you won't stick with it, so find something you truly enjoy.

Often, we think that in order to be effective, exercise needs to be something difficult or even painful, but that's not necessarily the case. If you enjoy dancing, put on your favorite upbeat music and dance in your living room or bedroom every day for at least 15 to 30 minutes. It's a fun cardio workout that'll simultaneously lift your mood and you won't even realize that you're working out (tip: if you're on Spotify, they have a "Browse" section with amazing playlists that you can choose according to your mood, the lists "Feeling good" and "Have a great day!" are great ones to dance to, but you can also find lists to run, cycle etc. to). If you're not sure what type of activity you enjoy, sign up for a bunch of different classes at your local gym or try different home workouts until you find something you like. That being said, don't dismiss a form of exercise just because you don't immediately love it. It may take a few tries before you know if you really like it or not.

Whether you exercise at home or at a gym is often more a question of how much time and/or money you have. If you feel like working out with other people will motivate you more but you don't currently have the budget to join a gym, there are plenty of options that require very little or no money at all. You can find group exercise classes at community centers and some of them use a "pay what you can" system. I've spoken to people who organize these and they say that many people who come to these classes can't pay at all, but that that is never an issue and even part of the reason they put this system in place. You could also find exercise buddies online on pages like MeetUp or in local Facebook groups. You could go for walks or play badminton or frisbee in the park.

For those of you who *do* like to workout at home, a fantastic (and free!) website and YouTube channel is *Fitness Blender* (www.fitnessblender.com), where you can find hundreds of free workouts for every level, as well as informative Q&As and tutorials.

Tip: if you don't have much time but want to see results faster, check out HIIT (high intensity interval training – you'll find plenty of those on the Fitness Blender website). They're fun and intense workouts that combine strength and cardio training in the most effective way. Focusing on strength in addition to cardio is particularly effective because muscles burn more calories than fat, even in their resting state, which means that you'll naturally boost your metabolism.

Do the best you can

I can't stress this enough, but don't be too hard on yourself. Push yourself beyond what feels comfortable, but also focus on your small successes. Be both optimistic and realistic when it comes to your goals and dreams. That means that you should set goals that are beyond what you ever thought possible, but accept that it may take time to get there. If you never workout and your goal is to run a marathon, fantastic! But realize that it'll take many smaller steps in order to get there and celebrate every single one of them. Be your own cheerleader and number 1 fan. So often, we end up being harder on ourselves than anyone else could ever be. Perhaps we think that if we take care of the negative self talk, it won't hurt quite as much if others are hard on us? If you can relate to this, try to shift your perspective. How about being so incredibly loving and encouraging towards yourself that it won't even matter how others see and treat you? If you frequently think thoughts like "I'll never get there, I'm not good enough...", ask yourself if you would like it if someone else talked to you

that way. No? Then don't accept it from yourself either. Talk to yourself as if you were a dear friend you were trying to encourage, instead.

Quick tips on how to stay active even if you're busy

- Consider a standing desk - This may sound a little crazy, but there are many benefits to standing while working at a desk (you can find standing desks at most furniture stores nowadays). Sitting all day is not ideal for our backs and can increase the risk of obesity and other health issues. If you would like to transition to a standing desk, just make sure you do so slowly in order to get used to it.
- Take the stairs: taking the stairs instead of the elevator whenever you can is a fantastic way to increase your activity level without investing too much time.
- Walk or ride a bike instead of taking public transportation or a car (only you have the opportunity to do so, of course. If you're required to travel long distances for work, try to walk more in your free time).
- Walk a dog. Even if you don't have a dog, many shelters need volunteers to walk the rescued dogs they're taking care of. So, if you'd like to spend more time surrounded by animals and give back to the community at the same time, look up the nearest shelters and contact them about volunteer opportunities.
- Clean your house/apartment more often: cleaning is actually a great workout since you're on your feet and constantly moving.
- Turn your TV sessions into workout sessions. Time goes by so much more quickly if you're being entertained, so why not use your TV time to do a few sit-ups, crunches or planks?
- Dance whenever you can! Whether you think you're a great dancer or not doesn't really matter, but moving your body this way has so many benefits. Got an extra 4 minutes to spare? Turn on the radio (happy and uplifting songs can raise your mood as well) and shake it off. Whatever "it" may be, those extra pounds, your worries and frustrations, dancing can be like a mini therapy session!