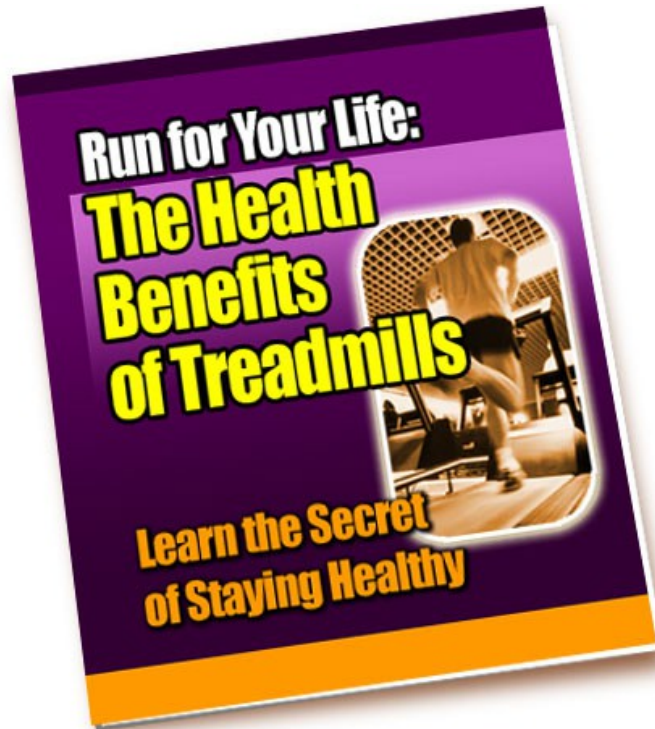


Run for Your Life: The Health Benefits of Treadmills



Improve your heart's health? Lose a few pounds? Or simply become more active? If that is your goal, then maybe it's time for you to do some exercise. But where do you start?

No matter how good our intentions are, we really can't force ourselves to commute three or four times a week to the gym. What with our hectic lifestyles, increased work loads, and various other commitments, we simply don't have such luxury as time. As a result, our exercise routines suffer, which, of course, points only to one thing – our health.

For this reason, Americans, young and old alike, are trying to search for solutions to their exercise dilemma. They are looking for specifically one that will fit into their demanding schedules yet still afford them with a quality workout with positive results. The answer, of course, is the ever-present treadmill.

Scientific Facts

Experts agree that physical activity need not be strenuous in order to be beneficial. In fact, only moderate amounts of daily physical activity are recommended for people of all ages. Too much can lead to injuries, menstrual abnormalities, and bone weakening.

- Among American youths aged 12-21 years, almost half admit to not being vigorously active on a regular basis
- 14 % of young people report that they engage in no recent physical activity
- This inactivity trend is more common among females (14%) than among males (7%). Among black females, 21% are inactive, while white females only comprise 12%.
- As age or grade in school increases, participation in all types of physical activity declines strikingly
- Of all high school students, only 19% are physically active for 20 minutes or more, five days a week, in physical education class
- Between 1991 and 1995, daily enrollment in physical education classes dropped from 42 percent to 25 percent
- Well designed school-based interventions directed at increasing physical activity in physical education classes have been shown to be effective
- Social support from family and friends has been consistently and positively related to regular physical activity

Though not the be-all and end-all of everything, engaging in physical activity does have effects that can be very beneficial to your health. First, it helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints. Not only that, but it has a direct effect on weight control, building lean muscles, and fat reduction. Physical activity can also prevent or delay the development of high blood pressure and helps reduce blood pressure in some adolescents with hypertension.

If physical education doesn't do the job (especially if you're no longer schooling), then engage in physical activity at home by your own initiative. Home exercise equipment, such as treadmills and stationary bikes, have been known to produce the same effects as running or walking outside.

A study published in the Journal of the American Association showed that treadmills easily outpaced an exercise bicycle, a rowing machine, and a cross-country skiing machine. The study was conducted with a group of volunteers at the Milwaukee Veterans Administration Hospital. The volunteers were made to do a series of workouts on different machines, each time exercising at what felt like the same intensity.

To measure the number of calories burned, researchers used a special device.

Dr. Martin Hoffman of the Medical College of Wisconsin found that "the treadmill allowed the individuals to burn as much as 200 calories per hour more than the bicycle ergometer, which came out having the lowest energy expenditure."

The #1 Choice in Home Exercise Equipment

As a home exercise equipment, the treadmill presents both convenience and affordability in one neat package. It's not as expensive as other home exercise equipment and yet it produces very nearly the same positive results. Not only that, but the treadmill has always been a favorite among exercise enthusiasts, whether they do their exercises at home or in the gym.

Using a treadmill to exercise and burn down calories is very simple, even the most un-sporty individual can do it. Why? Because a treadmill requires nothing more from you than doing something that you've been doing for most of your life – WALKING.

“They will probably always be the Number 1 item because they appeal to the two most popular forms of exercising – walkers and runners,” said Communications Director for the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association Mike May.

According to the annual consumer survey of the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, more than 45 million Americans currently use treadmills today, either at home or in a gym. They are even more popular than stationary bikes (considered as the Number 2 choice), stair machines, ellipticals, and rowing machines.

Perhaps, what makes treadmills really stick among the mass of exercise and fitness enthusiasts is that it can guarantee a consistent workout in all seasons and in all climates. With a treadmill, you do not have to think about common running worries, such as weather conditions – too hot, too cold, too windy, too wet, too humid, and so on. Treadmills provide a means of exercise that is “just right.”

Why Treadmills?

Your goal when engaging in physical activity is to burn down calories and keep yourself physically fit and healthy. Compared to just 500 calories per hour on the

exercise bike, the average medium-intensity treadmill workout burned 700 calories per hour. Dr. Hoffman said that one reason for this difference is the amount of muscle mass that is used in both exercises. Apparently, when you walk or run on a treadmill, you use more muscles than you do on a bike, stationary or otherwise.

The greatest benefit of treadmill exercise is burning calories. However, it is not the only reason why you should consider this type of workout. For people with certain health conditions, engaging in vigorous physical activity can be detrimental to their lives and their health. People such as those with osteoporosis, hypertension, and back pains are recommended to do no more than walking when they exercise so as not to cause any overexert themselves. The treadmill, therefore, provides them with an exciting alternative to just plain walking outside.

A treadmill can add consistency to your walking workout. Most models have programming in them that allow you to maintain speed and intensity throughout your entire workout. They also have incline device that would let you control the inclination of your walk, exactly as though you are walking up or down hill.

Walking for 45 minutes, five times a week can cut your chances of getting a flu or cold in half, according to a research conducted by the Harvard Medical School. But you can't really walk, can you, if it's raining outside? That is why the treadmill - where climate changes don't matter - is great to have around.

Furthermore, the treadmill can be used by anyone – young, old, male, female, pregnant, not pregnant.... Let's take pregnant women, for example. While some aerobic activities can be risky during pregnancy, walking is actually beneficial to both the child and the mother. Hormonal changes caused by pregnancy can loosen ligaments. In order to tone muscles down and strengthen the joints that support the growing baby, walking is recommended for pregnant women.

The treadmill also helps prevent injuries that could happen when you run outside on uneven or even wet ground. Gravity can have very nasty effects, however beneficial running and sunlight might be. A treadmill with good cushioning on the belt will help support each foot-strike you make, making your running or walking easier.

Finally, if you are just looking to get in shape, walking or jogging on a treadmill improves muscle tone and not just in your legs, but all over your body. Strengthened muscles means the heart can pump more oxygen-rich blood with each step you take.

Exercising the Right Way on a Treadmill

You know what they say: “You get the most out of anything if you do it properly.” Exercising the right way on a treadmill is no different. If you want to get the most enjoyment and benefit out of treadmill exercise, then do it the right way.

Here are some tips to help you maximize the health benefits of treadmill exercise:

1. Footwork

As your foot comes forward and your heel strikes the ground, here’s what you do: raise your toes and roll forward onto the outside of your foot (but keep the entire shoe sole on the ground). As your foot passes under your body, straighten your knee and press the ground with the ball of your foot, maintaining pressure until your toes leave the ground. Do this for the entire duration of your run.

2. Hip Rotation

Walk from your waist, allowing your hips to rotate naturally with the forward and backward movement of your legs. Meanwhile, your shoulders should stay relaxed and facing forward.

3. Arm Swing

Let your arms swing at your sides in the same forward-backward direction as your hips and legs. As you increase your speed, bend your arms at a right angle and swing them faster in rhythm with your legs.

Do all of the above and you'll be fit in no time. Elaine Ward of NARWF says that to get the most out of your walking routine, you have to consider the way your foot touches the ground, how your torso is positioned, and how your arms swing. The above tips should be able to help you do just that.