Do You Exercise Too Much?

Objective

To decrease the amount of time you work out if you exercise excessively.

You Should Know

Moderate exercise offers a variety of health benefits. But exercising too much can negatively impact your physical health. Sometimes people who have eating disorders exercise too much because they are trying to compensate for overeating, or they wish to "burn" the calories they have consumed.

How do you know if you exercise too much? Exercise becomes an unhealthy habit when it's excessive, driven, and done compulsively. You might constantly think about working out. You might exercise more often or longer than recommended to compensate for the number of calories you've consumed. You might just exercise to "burn off" fat because you want to lose weight or change your body shape.

When you exercise in a driven or obsessive manner, you might think that you're using most of the calories you've consumed. However, this isn't the case. If you exercise excessively and restrict eating when you're not overeating, your metabolism actually slows because your body needs to retain the energy from the food you've eaten. Intense over-exercise also breaks down muscle fiber instead of using stored fat. Your immune system could be affected, so you might become sick or injured.

If you exercise to control your weight, think about when you began this habit. Maybe you'd put on some weight. Maybe you wanted to get fit, decrease stress, or you joined a sport and needed to get into shape. As time went on, you might have increased the intensity and duration of your exercise sessions. Initially, you might have felt good about your new routine. It was OK to overeat because you could simply burn the excess calories through intense exercise. You might have increased the number of times you exercised each week so that you could eat junk food or overeat.

Now, excessive exercise might be a habit and you might feel stressed if you miss a workout session. Sometimes you might even "punish" yourself if you binge by adding exercise sessions to your schedule.

How much time do you spend exercising each day and/or each week? _____

_____

The following exercise will help you recognize if you over-exercise, and then you will explore ways to decrease the amount of time you exercise each week.

What to Do

Below is a list of behaviors common to people who exercise excessively. Please rate yourself on the following statements. Use the scale 1 = This doesn't apply to me at all to 10 = This always applies to me.

_____ I exercise immediately following the times that I overeat.

_____ Exercise isn't for fun - I exercise because I have to make up for what I've eaten.

_____ I feel a strong urge to exercise when I'm upset, distressed, anxious, stressed, or angry.

_____ I become very upset if I can't exercise after eating a large amount of food.

_____ I become anxious or feel guilty if I miss a scheduled workout.

_____ I exercise instead of hanging out with my friends or participating in other social activities.

_____ I exercise even if I'm ill or injured.

_____ I exercise intensely for more than one hour every day.

_____ I exercise intensely more than once a day.

_____ I exercise every day, and I don't take breaks or rest days.

_____ Bad things will happen if I don't work out (e.g., I will gain weight or get fat).

_____ My body must be perfect or I'm unhappy.

_____ Even if I'm exhausted I make time to work out.

_____ I ignore spending time with my family or friends if it interferes with my workout.

_____ If I overeat and I'm unable to exercise I find other ways to rid my body of the calories (e.g., vomiting or using laxatives).

Add up your score: _____

If your score is 75 points or more, you might be excessively exercising. Now, answer the following questions.

Think About It

Are you willing to consider decreasing the amount of time you exercise? _____

If yes, what can you do each day to lessen your time exercising and create a healthy and balanced exercise routine?

_____

_____

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Some ideas include:
- Each week, schedule time to exercise and include rest days – and stick to it!
- Including less intense activities, such as yin yoga.
- Limit yourself to exercising just once a day.
- Limit yourself to exercising just 30-60 minutes each day.
- Lessen the intensity of exercise sessions. In other words, instead of taking an intense 60-minute spin class, take a relaxing bike ride.
- Join an active social group (check local Meet Ups and outdoor hiking or cycling clubs).
- Consider activities that are less likely to cause physical injury, such as swimming.

Describe three things you will do to create a healthy exercise routine.

_____

_____

_____

Can you think of other ideas? _____

_____

If you aren't willing to consider limiting exercise, what are your fears about decreasing the amount of time you spend working out? Be completely honest.

_____

_____

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Next, complete the chart for one week to track the amount of time you exercise.

Day	Type(s) of Activity	Total Amount of Time Spent	How Did You Feel After Exercising? *Describe what you did to limit yourself.*
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(**1** = not very helpful, **5** = moderately helpful, **10** = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

_____

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