

Don't exercise to lose weight

By Dr. Davis | March 16, 2016

Palm Springs

There are plenty of good reasons to exercise . . . but losing weight is not one of them.

Yes, there are people, genetically-determined or armed with extraordinary determination, who can lose weight with a strenuous exercise program. But the majority lose a modest quantity and that's the end of it. They even continue to torture themselves for years, telling themselves that they are burning calories, burning off fat, and if they would only exercise longer and harder they would lose weight—but don't.

Is it worth exercising if it does not result in substantial control over weight? Yes, indeed it is. Among the reasons to exercise with some regularity include:

Reduction in insulin resistance—i.e., the effect that leads to higher blood sugars and type 2 diabetes. Insulin responses are improved in both muscle and liver.

Reduction in fatty liver—exercise can be one component of an effort to reverse fatty liver or non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

Growth of brain tissue—especially the hippocampus involved with memory and spatial navigation (e.g., walking and balance). In other words, exercise likely protects you from dementia.

Improved mood—greater well-being, less depression, less anxiety all result from exercise, even if you don't achieve the level required to experience the euphoric "runner's high."

Deeper sleep—Physical exertion is a terrific soporific.

Protection from osteoporosis and fractures—especially resistance training and any movement resulting in axial impact, e.g., jumping.

Maintenance of muscle mass and flexibility—adding to the reduction in insulin resistance and maintaining youthfulness.

Reduction of chronic pain and chronic fatigue syndrome—Not huge effects, but exercise can be one component of a broader effort.

That's just a partial list, but you get the idea: exercise is a marvelous means of maintaining health, even partially counteracting the effects of aging. But do it for the right reasons.

In my view, one of the most important aspects of exercise is not duration, or intensity, or whether you wear spandex pants or not. It's whether you enjoy the activity you choose.

Select activities that you love to do, not activities that make you despise or avoid the effort.

I snapped the photo above north of the Coachella Valley in Southern California during a 5-mile hike through the desert and mountains. 85 degrees, dry, blue cloudless sky, with a light breeze—an invigorating walk with spectacular views that, because of climbing about 1000 feet up hills, kept my heart rate up. And I didn't lose a pound. I did it because I like it.