



Fitness Trends for 2004

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The importance of motivating our sedentary society to move more will grow in 2004. There are already signs and predictions that how we exercise is going to change as well.

Many people think of exercise as a weight loss project. Yet studies suggest that if people who have a healthy weight remain inactive they are likely to gain more weight than those who become active. Regular exercise definitely promotes heart health. But in recent years exercise has become seen as a major step in lowering the risk of many health concerns, including diabetes and several types of cancer, like colon, kidney, uterine and postmenopausal breast cancers. The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) recommends daily exercise as a full partner with healthy eating to lower cancer risk.

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) claims that several changes in how we exercise will soon occur. The strongest trend involves efforts to develop efficient workouts that require less time. Recent government guidelines have repeated the long-held advice of AICR that an hour of physical activity each day is best for most people.

However, it may be possible to obtain complete health benefits in less time. A recent study found that shorter, more intense workout programs had fewer dropouts and produced good muscle-building results. Research is needed to see if newer methods can produce all of the same benefits in less than an hour.

Some fitness experts suggest interspersing brief periods of fast or hard exercise with moderate activities to shorten a workout. As long as people do not push themselves

beyond the safety of their fitness level, this can effectively burn more calories in less time. Because both strength-training and aerobic exercise are important to overall fitness, some exercise specialists are developing ways to combine these two forms. Instead of 20 to 30 minutes of each type of exercise, a complete workout could take just 30 minutes.

Exercise will increasingly aim for a holistic view of health – benefits for both the body and mind. Yoga is already incorporated into a variety of different exercises, and this trend is expected to grow. Breathing, body awareness and posture will become more important. A stronger holistic emphasis should enhance exercise's proven ability to reduce stress.

ACE also predicts that technology will make various forms of telephone and Internet coaching more common. Coaching will address not only fitness and performance, but also concerns such as stress reduction, time management and nutrition. As independent coaches become more available, consumers will need to check qualifications because alongside trained individuals, some without training will inevitably offer their services.

For a financial advantage, employers and insurers may increasingly encourage, provide and partly pay for programs to promote healthy lifestyles. Treatment of long-term health problems, like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and cancer that stem from overweight, lack of exercise and poor eating habits take a bigger and bigger chunk of health care dollars. Healthy living can be a money-saver.

Finally, ACE predicts a return to sensible weight loss programs and nutrition as millions of Americans complete the latest round of restrictive diets without lasting success. People should see the benefits of sound advice, such as AICR's New American Plate, which emphasizes portion control and a wide variety of health-protective vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans.

If you need help to improve your eating habits and prevent weight gain, *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*[™] can help. Contact your local base Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian for more information.