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AFQ & A

BY MATT BRZYCKI

Does aerobic training improve mood?

For many years, it has been known that exercise has a positive effect on mood. Research has shown that the improvement in mood lasts for a few minutes to a few hours.

But a recent study has shown that the post-exercise effect on mood may be of much longer duration. In the study, researchers at the University of Vermont randomly assigned 48 healthy, college-aged subjects to two groups: One group did 20 minutes of aerobic training on a stationary bike while the other group acted as a control and didn't do any exercise.

Prior to the experiment, all subjects were given an assessment of mood that looked at six areas: tension, anger, depression, vigor, fatigue and confusion. The assessment was repeated immediately after the treatment or control condition and then again at 1, 2, 4, 8, 12 and 24 hours post-exercise.

It was found that aerobic training of moderate intensity—the average exercising heart rate was about 112 beats per minute—improved mood state for up to 12 hours post-exercise. Another great reason to exercise!

Is it okay to exercise when sick?

The best guide for deciding whether or not to exercise when sick is the location of the symptoms. Specifically, are the symptoms located above or below the neck?

When the symptoms are above the neck—such as a stuffy or runny nose, headache, sore throat or sneezing—the illness is relatively mild and probably will not worsen with exercise. Sometimes, in fact, the symptoms may temporarily improve while exercising. For example, exercise may unclog a stuffy nose. But when the symptoms are below the neck—such as a chest cold, hacking cough, muscle aches, fever, chills, nausea or vomiting—the illness is more severe and probably will worsen with exercise. In this case, rest is needed.

If the illness is mild and the choice is made to exercise, a level of intensity that's below normal should be employed. Symptoms that worsen during exercise are a clear indication to stop.

A related topic that often gets overlooked is whether or not the illness can spread to others in the gym. Something like this shouldn't be taken lightly as the health of others is now at stake.

When in doubt, hold off on exercising until healthy. And, of course, seek medical advice.

Do consumers make better choices at restaurants when they're provided with calorie information?

Studies have shown that most consumers cannot estimate caloric content on their own with any degree of consistency and accuracy. But given this information, will consumers actually change their eating habits?

In 2008, New York became the first city in the country that required restaurant chains with 15 or more locations nationwide to post calorie information on menus and menu boards. Researchers looked at 45 restaurants that represented the 15 largest fast-food chains in the city, conducting surveys about three months before and three months after the law was fully enforced.

A total of 1,188 customers completed the pre-enforcement survey and 1,229 completed the post-enforcement survey. The surveys indicated that customer awareness of calorie information nearly doubled, from 38% to 72%, in the weighted analyses after restau-

rants posted it on their menu board. And the percentage of customers who reported that their food choices were influenced by the calorie information increased from 10% to 20%.

Other research has found conflicting results. However, this study shows that making calorie information available increases customer awareness and may lead to better eating habits.

MATT BRZYCKI is the Assistant Director of Campus Recreation, Fitness at Princeton University. He has more than 28 years of experience at the collegiate level and has authored, co-authored and edited 17 books.

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