
IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH, FITNESS, AND WELLNESS

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Physical fitness is a state of health and well-being and, more specifically, the ability to perform aspects of sports, occupations and daily activities. Physical fitness is generally achieved through proper nutrition,^[1] moderate-vigorous physical exercise,^[2] and sufficient rest.^[3]

Before the industrial revolution, *fitness* was defined as the capacity to carry out the day's activities without undue fatigue. However, with automation and changes in lifestyles *physical fitness* is now considered a measure of the body's ability to function efficiently and effectively in work and leisure activities, to be healthy, to resist hypokinetic diseases, and to meet emergency situations.^[4]

Fitness is defined^[5] as the quality or state of being fit. Around 1950, perhaps consistent with the Revolution and the treatise of World War II, the term "fitness" increased in western vernacular by a factor of ten.^[6] Modern definition of fitness describe either a person or machine's ability to perform a specific function or a holistic definition of human adaptability to cope with various situations. This has led to an interrelation of human fitness and attractiveness which has mobilized global fitness and fitness equipment industries. Regarding specific function, fitness is attributed to person who possess significant aerobic or anaerobic ability, i.e. strength or endurance. A holistic definition of fitness is described by Greg Glassman in the CrossFit journal as an increased work capacity across broad times and modal domains; mastery of several attributes of fitness including strength, endurance, power, speed, balance and coordination and being able to improve the amount of work done in a given time with any of these domains.^[7] A well rounded fitness program will improve a person in all aspects of fitness, rather than one, such as only cardio/respiratory endurance or only weight training.

A comprehensive fitness program tailored to an individual typically focuses on one or more specific skills,^[8] and on age-^[9] or health-related needs such as bone health.^[10] Many sources^[11] also cite mental, social and emotional health as an important part of overall fitness. This is often presented in textbooks as a triangle made up of three points, which represent physical, emotional, and mental fitness. Physical fitness can also prevent or treat many chronic

health conditions brought on by unhealthy lifestyle or aging.^[12] Working out can also help some people sleep better and possibly alleviate some mood disorders in certain individuals.^[13]

Developing research has demonstrated that many of the benefits of exercise are mediated through the role of skeletal muscle as an endocrine organ. That is, contracting muscles release multiple substances known as myokines which promote the growth of new tissue, tissue repair, and various anti-inflammatory functions, which in turn reduce the risk of developing various inflammatory diseases.^[14]

Primary Components of Fitness

The four primary components (also known as the components of health related fitness) that are important to improved physical health are as follows:

- **Cardio respiratory capacity** is the ability of the body to take in oxygen (respiration), deliver it to the cells (circulation), and use it at the cellular level to create energy (bioenergetics) for physical work (activity). In fitness, we also refer to cardio respiratory capacity as aerobic capacity. This capacity includes aerobic endurance (how long), aerobic strength (how hard), and aerobic power (how fast). Some of the long-term adaptations of cardio respiratory training are: decreased resting heart rate, decreased risk of cardiovascular disease, improved endurance, increased stroke volume and cardiac output.
- **Muscular capacity** refers to the spectrum of muscular capability. This includes muscular endurance (i.e., the ability to apply force over a long period of time or to complete repeated muscle contractions); muscular strength (i.e., the ability to generate force, or the maximum amount of force that a muscle can exert in a single contraction); and muscular power (i.e., the ability to generate strength in an explosive way). Some of the long-term adaptations of improving muscular capacity are increased strength, improved muscular endurance, increased basal metabolic rate, improved joint strength, and overall posture.
- **Flexibility** is the range of movement or amount of motion that a joint is capable of performing. Each joint has a different amount of flexibility. Some of the long-term adaptations of improved flexibility are decreased risk of injury, improved range of motion, improved bodily movements, and improved posture.
- **Body composition** is the proportion of fat-free mass (muscle, bone, blood, organs, and fluids) to fat mass (adipose tissue deposited under the skin and around organs). Some of the long-term

adaptations of improving body composition are decreased risk of cardiovascular disease, improved basal metabolic rate, improved bodily function, and improved BMI.

Secondary Components of Fitness

The secondary components of fitness (also known as the components of performance based fitness) are involved in all physical activity and are necessary for daily functioning. Athletes experience different levels of success depending on how well these secondary fitness components are developed. Although the primary components of fitness are thought to be the most important, we should not ignore the secondary components because of their importance in the completion of daily tasks. The secondary components include the following.

- **Balance** is the ability to maintain a specific body position in either a stationary or dynamic (moving) situation.
- **Coordination** is the ability to use all body parts together to produce smooth and fluid motion.
- **Agility** is the ability to change direction quickly.
- **Reaction time** is the time required to respond to a specific stimulus.
- **Speed** is the ability to move rapidly. Speed is also known as velocity (rate of motion).
- **Power** is the product of strength and speed. Power is also known as explosive strength.
- **Mental capability** is the ability to concentrate during exercise to improve training effects as well as the ability to relax and enjoy the psychological benefits of activity (endorphins).

Health and Wellness

Health is a dynamic process because it is always changing. We all have times of good health, times of sickness, and maybe even times of serious illness. As our lifestyles change, so does our level of health.

Those of us who participate in regular physical activity do so partly to improve the current and future level of our health. We strive toward an optimal state of well-being. As our lifestyle improves, our health also improves and we experience less disease and sickness. When most people are asked what it means to be healthy, they normally respond with the four components of fitness mentioned earlier (cardio respiratory ability, muscular ability, flexibility, and body composition). Although these components are a critical part of being healthy, they are not the only contributing factors. Physical health is only one aspect of our overall health.

The other components of health (Greenberg, 2004, p. 7) that are just as important as physical health include the following:

- **Social health**-The ability to interact well with people and the environment and to have satisfying personal relationships.
- **Mental health**-The ability to learn and grow intellectually. Life experiences as well as more formal structures (e.g., school) enhance mental health.
- **Emotional health**-The ability to control emotions so that you feel comfortable expressing them and can express them appropriately.
- **Spiritual health**-A belief in some unifying force. It varies from person to person but has the concept of faith at its core.

Wellness is the search for enhanced quality of life, personal growth, and potential through positive lifestyle behaviours and attitudes. If we take responsibility for our own health and well-being, we can improve our health on a daily basis. Certain factors influence our state of wellness, including nutrition, physical activity, stress-coping methods, good relationships, and career success.

Each day we work toward maximizing our level of health and wellness to live long, full, and healthy lives. The pursuit of health, personal growth, and improved quality of life relies on living a balanced life. To achieve balance, we need to care for our mind, body, and spirit.

If any of these three areas is consistently lacking or forgotten about, we will not be at our optimal level of health. We are constantly challenged with balancing each of these three areas throughout life.

As fitness professionals, we have a responsibility to guide and motivate others to improve their level of health and wellness. We can promote a holistic approach to health (mind, body, and spirit), not just encourage physical activity. As good role models, we should demonstrate positive health behaviours that assist in improving our own health and the health of others. If our focus is strictly on the physical benefits of exercise, we are doing a disservice to our clients and we are not fulfilling our professional obligation.

Conclusion

As fitness professionals, we spend a great deal of time inspiring and assisting others in their pursuit of improved health. Education is an important aspect of this. We must promote the benefits of regular activity and help people understand why they should be active.

In order for physical fitness to benefit the health of an individual, an unknown response in the person called a stimulus will be triggered by the exertion. When exercise is performed with the correct amount of intensity, duration and frequency, a significant amount of improvement can occur. The person may overall feel better but the physical effects on the human body take weeks or months to notice and possibly years for full development. For training purposes, exercise must provide a stress or demand on either a function or tissue. To continue improvements, this demand must eventually increase little over an extended period of time. This sort of exercise training has three basic principles: overload, specificity, and progression. These principles are related to health but also enhancement of physical working capacity.

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