

Want more energy? Dump the Couch and Get Moving

By Steve Baldwin, MS, RD, Associate Editor

Last year I got a divorce...from my couch.

I unceremoniously dumped her once I realized the years of love she gave were contributing to my love *handles*. She – okay fine, IT – was doing me more harm than good. I decided to publically break off our long standing (sitting?) relationship.

At the time I also felt that my green velour love was in cahoots with her buddy, the television. They were working together to bring me down, taking full advantage of my inclination for laziness, my natural preference for sloth. I sensed that they were taking energy from me instead of giving back.

Well, now I have proof. As reported in the June 2008 issue of the Tufts University Health and Nutrition Letter, two recent studies show that light exercise helps fight fatigue more than taking it easy. Researchers at the University of Georgia took people who were always tired – a condition that affects about 25% of us, they estimated – and had them do easy exercises, like riding a bike at a leisurely pace. They then compared self-reported energy levels of two exercise groups to a third group that did not exercise.

Guess what? The exercisers reported having 20% more energy than the couch potatoes. Another study found that just 10 minutes of exercise a day improved mental outlook, sociability, and vitality.

We already knew that regular exercise can help burn up “extra” calories eaten during the day. Adults should aim for 30 minutes of exercise on most days; children need 60 minutes each day. But if you’re just getting started and 10 minutes is all you can muster, it’s well worth your time and energy. In fact you might end up having more energy than you would have otherwise.

Other studies show that television isn’t much better for us than the couch. Kids who watch television during meals eat more calories and fewer nutritious foods. Academic achievement drops when kids watch more than 10 hours of television weekly, and kids who log more than 2 hours of “screen time” daily (television, internet, and video games combined) are more likely to be overweight than those who watch less.

Why not take a “relationship break” from your couch/television twosome? It’s time to get out that little black book (of exercise) and rekindle your relationship with an old flame or two. Maybe you’ll see what your bicycle has been up to. Or perhaps you’ll renew your love affair with tennis, or have a weekend rendezvous with your in-line skates. You could re-connect with your basketball, or have a little jaunt with your walking shoes. Whatever you choose, keep it fun so you’ll want to keep it going.

While you’re at it, why not have a fling with some fruits and vegetables? Stunning strawberries. Wonderful watermelon. Beautiful broccoli. Tantalizing tomatoes. Toss

them in salads, sneak them in snacks, love them at lunch and dig them at dinner. It's a healthy love affair that can last – and maybe even extend – your lifetime.

As for me, since I broke it off with the green velour couch, we've never gotten back together. I made sure of that. I gave her to my in-laws.

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