

# Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

## Studies Show Exercise Can Improve Your Sex Life



**E**XERCISE IS NOT ONLY A WELL-DOCUMENTED means of maintaining muscle and losing fat, recent studies propose that it can also revitalize your sex life. In a February 1999 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, scientists found that sexual dysfunction is more likely among those with poor physical and emotional health, and plays a major role with negative experiences in sexual relationships and with overall well-being.

### *Studying Sex and Exercise*

Sexual function is affected by general health, and the more you can do to improve your health by taking good care of yourself, the better your sex life can be.

Doctors at the New England Research Institute found that regular, vigorous exercise can be effective at lowering impotence risk. The researchers studied more than 600 middle-aged men who hadn't reported any problems with impotence. After eight years, the men who exercised regularly were less likely to have problems. Vigorous exercise — the equivalent of walking two miles or burning 200 extra calories a day — was most effective.

On the opposite coast, a University of California, San Diego study of 78 healthy but sedentary middle-aged men documented changes when the men were assigned to exercise three to four times a week for one-hour sessions. Overall, the former couch potatoes reported more reliable sexual functioning, more frequent sexual activity and orgasms, and greater satisfaction.

Yet another study, conducted at the Harvard School of Public Health, revealed that men who exercised vigorously for 20 to 30 minutes were about half as likely to have erection problems as inactive men. The scientists in this study also discov-

ered that as a man gained weight, he became more susceptible to experiencing erectile dysfunction (E.D.).

Women's sex lives can also benefit from regular exercise. Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin studied 35 women, ages 18 to 34. On two separate occasions the women first watched a short travel film, followed by an abbreviated X-rated film. To begin with, the subjects cycled vigorously for 20 minutes. The second time they didn't. Researchers calculated their sexual response using a device that measures blood flow in genital tissue, and discovered that the women's vaginal responses were 169 percent greater after exercising.

### *More to Love*

Doctors believe that exercise has the effect it does on increasing sexual potency because it strengthens the cardiovascular system and improves circulation. Good circulation is important for sexual function. Other things that hamper circulation include obesity, smoking or heavy alcohol use, however losing weight and quitting smoking or drinking didn't improve sexual function the way exercise did.

If exercise can do so much for your sex life, shouldn't more be even better? The answer is no, according to the same doctors who did the studies. Heavy exercise can actually decrease testosterone levels, leading to a less-robust sexual appetite. In addition, overtraining can compromise the immune system, which could also adversely affect sexual performance.

Exercise, while not a panacea, can be just what the doctor ordered for physical and psychological complaints.

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