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The EX-FILES

The festive season is often a period for excuses. But while you can try to make excuses for stuffing yourselves silly with those mouth-watering goodies, don't try to worm your way out of exercising regularly. Cindy Ng, senior physiotherapist, Singapore General Hospital, shows you how to stay on track.

If you have been bingeing over Christmas and the New Year, it is time to re-open the Ex-Files. Not the one scribbled with excuses. But the one that has the stamp of exercise on it.

Whether it is the festive period or otherwise, it is important to control and manage our diet as well as continue with our exercise regime. To maintain good health, you have got to try to be physically active. Brisk walking, swimming, dancing and recreational games are just some of the many simple and inexpensive routines you can get started on. They are also easy to maintain.

Can exercise burn fat?

Let's get down to the basics before we dive into how to lose the flab. So what is exercise? It is an activity that involves the use of your muscles continuously for at least 30 minutes, and increasing your pulse rate by 30%. That means you need to engage in an activity that maintains your pulse rate at 60 to 75% of the calculated maximum heart rate. (Heart rate





maximum is calculated by subtracting one's age from 220). So if you are 50 years old, your maximum heart rate should be 170.

If you maintain your pulse rate at 60-75% of that throughout for at least 30 minutes, you will be burning calories, and the percentage of 'fat burning' supersedes that of 'carbohydrate burning'. Contrary to what some fitness experts or websites would have you believe, there is no one superior exercise that can actually burn the most fat.

Intensity and frequency are key words in the EX-Files. Intensity refers to keeping your pulse rate up throughout. Some physical activities such as doing 50 repetitions of bicep curls using 2kg dumb bells may not result in a rise of the heart rate. However, resistance or weight training help to maintain your muscle mass which tends to decrease with age, thus affecting our efficiency in 'fat burning'.

Frequency refers to how often you exercise. You will need to exercise at least four times a week, if not every day. However, if you exercise at a high intensity where you work your heart to 80 to 90%, a day's rest will be good to allow your body cells to recover, thus preventing the risk of injuries. Variation is also important after about 12 weeks to prevent one's body from being too accustomed to the routine, especially if no change in weight is evident.

How does exercising lose the fat?

Some people find that exercise makes them less hungry thus regulating their appetite. For others, the fact that they exercise often gives them the excuse to eat more later. It is advisable to eat a light healthy meal after exercise and not wait for more than an hour to take a meal.

Exercise can help to maintain your metabolism by maintaining muscle mass and losing fat mass. Muscles are essential as they require energy to function and this energy comes in the form of calories burned. Exercise also improves blood flow and positively affects hormones that directly or indirectly affect fat storage and function, subsequently improving digestion. Exercise also helps you sleep better and improves your health profile in the areas of sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure control.