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health ask Dr. WD

Kenneth H. Cooper, M.D., M.P.H., president and founder of The Cooper Aerobics Center in Dallas, and coauthor of *Start Strong, Finish Strong*

Our Health Advisory Board expert, Kenneth Cooper, M.D., reveals how to get

fit for good

by Barbara Brody

I've heard that exercise won't help me lose weight. Is this true?

Yes and no. You can't expect to lose weight rapidly with exercise alone: You'd have to run 30 miles to lose just one pound! But *combining* exercise with a reduced-calorie diet may help you lose weight a little faster. More important, physical activity is essential for keeping the pounds off. Studies show that you need to do about 90 minutes of moderate activity (like walking or gardening) 4 to 5 times a week to maintain a healthy weight.

What is "exercise capacity"?

It's a measure of how well your heart, lungs and cardiovascular system use oxygen while you're exercising, and how fit you are. If your exercise capacity is low, it's a major risk factor for heart disease—but one that you can change by becoming more active. Your exercise capacity can be measured in several ways, but most often a doctor does it in a lab using a treadmill or bicycle stress test (you're hooked up to a machine that tracks your heart function while you exercise), or in a six-minute walk test, during which you walk as far as possible in six minutes (equipment measures your distance, heart rate and the amount of oxygen in your blood). I highly recommend that everyone find out her score, so ask your doctor about getting tested.

Is exercising in spurts as good as exercising for one large block of time?

Any exercise is better than none, but to get the maximum health benefits you really need to move for at least 30 minutes at a stretch. One of the best activities is fast walking (covering about 2 miles in 30 minutes). It'll get your heart rate up, and is much less likely to cause injury than something high-impact like running or jogging. Try fast walking for 30 minutes three days a week and you'll dramatically reduce your risk of cancer, heart disease and other ailments.

To ask a question, go to womansday.com/drwd

What's more important: cardio or strength training?

Most of your exercise should be cardio, but strength training also matters—especially as you age and muscle mass decreases. Change the balance of your workouts: If you're under 40, plan to do 80 percent aerobics and 20 percent strength training; shift to 30 percent strength training in your 40s, 40 percent strength training in your 50s, and 45 percent strength training in your 60s and older.