

TULSA WORLD

Friday, May 20, 2016 10:28 am

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Make time for exercise: Your life depends on it



Tonja Hitchcock has made exercise part of her lifestyle after learning what a difference it can make to her health.

Exercise improves the quality of your life. It boosts your mood, gives you more energy, improves muscular strength and endurance, aids in weight management and increases your productivity.

Exercise also helps combat high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease. In fact, regular physical activity can help you prevent or manage a stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, some cancers, arthritis and back pain.

“Physical exercise should be a part of anyone’s heart-healthy regimen, whether you are apparently healthy or trying to prevent heart disease or manage an existing heart condition,” says Jason Duvall, Exercise Physiologist - Cardiac Rehab with Hillcrest Exercise & Lifestyle Programs.

For cardiovascular conditioning and heart disease prevention, Duvall says you must include aerobic exercise, which elevates the heart rate for a sustained period of time.

American Heart Association guidelines recommend a minimum of 150 minutes per week of aerobic exercise. You also should include components of strength training and flexibility training three to four times a week. Stretching and flexibility training can be done most days of the week.

For most people, finding the right time and developing the habit of consistent exercise is the most difficult task. Duvall recommends making it an appointment on your daily calendar.

“Find the best time that works for you,” he says. “It’s more important that we exercise rather than when. Remember, you are not being selfish taking time for yourself with exercise; you’re better for it.”

Just as important is selecting an exercise facility close to where you live or work. This will set you up for success.

Duvall recommends getting approval from your physician before beginning any exercise program. Other tips include:

- Always exercise in moderation.
- Exercise on a consistent schedule if possible.
- Drink plenty of water before and after exercise.
- Look for ways to increase general physical activity throughout the day.
- Don’t dismiss pain or discomfort as these could be signs of overexertion.
- Experiment with a variety of routines; there are so many options.

Duvall often develops exercise programs and prescriptions for patients with chronic illnesses.

Tonja Hitchcock is one of his patients who completed Hillcrest’s Cardiac Rehabilitation program, which includes 36 sessions.

“Her medical history included congestive heart failure (CHF),” Duvall says. “Our objective was to help her increase overall aerobic and exercise capacity and endurance, improve and increase Ejection Fraction (the fraction of outbound blood pumped from the heart with each heartbeat) and improve her quality of life. For patients like her with CHF, progression of the volume of exercise is a key component. The duration and frequency of effort should be up-titrated before intensity is increased.”

Patients who complete a comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation program reduce their risk of cardiovascular death by 20 to 25 percent and reduce cardiac-related hospital admissions.

“Consistency of three to four days per week of aerobic exercise post rehab will improve these percentages,” Duvall says.

Hitchcock’s journey with Hillcrest Fitness Center began in September 2015.

“I went in for a routine cardiac screening paid for by my employer, GableGotwals, soon to find out I was diagnosed with cardiomyopathy,” says Hitchcock, 46.

After a hospital stay in November, starting medication and becoming educated about the condition, she began cardiac rehab in December.

“I had never exercised in my life!” Hitchcock says. “I always thought I was too busy or too tired to put in the effort. “

That has totally changed in the last six months after the staff at the fitness center educated her on the importance of exercise to her health.

“Not only have they introduced me to an exercise program, they have been so encouraging,” Hitchcock adds. “They understand the health issues involved and are experts on patient care. I have come to really enjoy my exercise time each week at the fitness center. I can feel the benefits, and, most importantly, I have seen a significant improvement in my heart health.”

Hitchcock has learned to make exercising a part of her lifestyle. She now understands that exercise, along with diet and medication, is going to be essential for her to have a long, healthy life.

“I have a wonderful husband, three beautiful daughters and a granddaughter,” Hitchcock says. “I want to be around for a long time. I owe my doctors at Hillcrest and the staff at Hillcrest Fitness Center a big thank you! “

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