



National Competitiveness and Productivity Council

Regular Exercise and Your Productive Output

It is a known fact that regular exercise can improve your health. It is key to managing your weight and maintaining healthy organs. But did you know that exercise can make you more productive? How is this possible? Well, the latest research shows that regular exercise can make you happier, smarter, and more energetic.

In his article 'Exercise Increases Productivity' within The Huffington Post, Robert Pozen states,

'A habit of regular exercise will help keep you mentally sharper throughout your entire life. As you age, your body generates fewer and fewer brain cells (a process called neurogenesis). However, early research in mice suggests that exercise can help prevent this slowdown. In other words, by the time they reach their 50s, 60s, and 70s, people who exercise might have more brain cells than their more sedentary peers -- giving them a major advantage in the workplace.'

Over a shorter time-frame, regular exercise has been proven to provide energy to the body throughout the day. Our cells contain components called mitochondria, often referred to as the cell's "power plant." Mitochondria in turn produces the chemical that our bodies use as energy, known as ATP. Physical exercise stimulates the development of new mitochondria within our cells, so that our bodies produce more ATP over time. This gives us more energy to exert ourselves physically, but it also means more energy for the brain, boosting mental output.

If you do not regularly exercise don't panic however as it is not necessary to sweat up a storm to achieve these benefits. In a randomized controlled trial, researchers from the University of Georgia split people into three groups: low-intensity exercise, moderate-intensity exercise, and a control group who did not exercise at all. During the six-week experiment, both "exercise" groups reported growing levels of energy (compared to the control group). Notably, there was no substantial difference in results between the moderate- and low-intensity exercise groups.

This experiment suggests that exercise can make you feel more energized within a few weeks. By contrast, the effect of exercise on your mood is immediate. When we exercise, our body releases several different chemicals within our brain. Collectively these are known as neurotransmitters. Although the mechanisms aren't fully understood, these neurotransmitters seem to reduce the discomfort of exercise and create the sensation often referred to as "runner's high." Yet, despite all of this many people still find it hard to exercise regularly. When this is the case it is often suggested that individuals should organize a group of friends or family members to work out with.

Pozen continues,

'Fortunately, working out with others is also more fun, as researchers found by studying elite male rowers at Oxford University. The rowers first exercised on a rowing machine in the company of their teammates; the next day, they performed the same workout at the same intensity, but by themselves. After each session, researchers tested the pain tolerance of each of the athletes, finding a higher pain tolerance when the rowers worked out together. The researchers concluded that exercising with others enhances the release of the pain-suppressing (and happiness-inducing) chemicals in your brain.'

Therefore, the evidence is compelling. A modest exercise habit can help keep you sharper into old age, give you more energy to take on the day, and improve your mood, all in all helping to improve your productivity. So stop making excuses, find a group of like-minded peers, and start exercising today!

About the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC)

Established in October 2013, The National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC) is responsible for the identification of key issues related to competitiveness and productivity in Saint Lucia.

The NCPC and its Technical Secretariat is committed to providing the necessary advocacy and research to produce timely and effective recommendations to policymakers on issues that affect both competitiveness and productivity on island. For more information about productivity or on the NCPC, visit www.stluciancpc.org; www.facebook.com/stluciancpc, call 468-5571/5576 or send an e-mail to stluciancpc@gmail.com