

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICING PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE THE GENERAL HEALTH OF THE POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

Practicing physical exercises to improve health receives new valences lately. If until the end of the last century only some physical exercises specific to certain sports were considered effective, lately the concept of physical activities for health is gaining ground. In this situation, physical exercise, or physical activity practiced systematically, is increasingly oriented towards health, improving health and/or preventing disease.

KEYWORDS: *physical activity, fitness, health*

J.E.L Classification: I13, I18, Z20

1. INTRODUCTION

The international social context makes us think more seriously than ever about the idea of survival, and/or what we should do to secure our lives. If the pandemic generated by the SARS Cov II virus forced us to retreat to our homes, to limit our physical activity, but especially social, the military situation in Ukraine adds additional mental consumption. So we are talking about a social situation that directly influences our general health. Specialists present health as a continuous model that swings between the two extremes, defining two distinct situations: positive health associated with the ability to enjoy life and not necessarily the absence of disease, while negative health is associated with morbidity, so when we talk about the role of physical activities in health promotion we must understand, both physical health and psychological well-being (CDC 1996:21).

Until the end of the last century, various forms of physical exercise specific to certain sports disciplines were recommended for health maintenance. Even if in a common knowledge it is mentioned that a whole series of other common physical activities, such as: walking, swimming, cycling, working in the garden, etc., have beneficial effects on the health of the body, only in the last decade health specialists and the science of body activities draw attention to the importance of practicing them. They mention that it is not necessary to practice performance sports in order to have a healthy body, or even, to improve and maintain health, the individual must practice a mandatory and sufficient level of physical activity, adapted to his particularities, consisting of activities or movements specific to the daily lifestyle (Bogdan T, Lazar L 2010:172). In 1996, American specialists from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) presented the relationship between physical activity and health as a new perspective on physical activity, promoting the following ideas, representing conclusions of the specialized literature and extensive research:

- People who are normally inactive can improve their health and well-being by regularly practicing moderate physical activity.
- Physical activity does not necessarily have to be vigorous to have health effects;
- More beneficial effects on the body can be obtained by practicing more (duration, frequency and intensity) physical exercise.

The specialized literature (Bogdan T, Lazăr L 2009, 2010) presents the concept of **"Physical activities for health"** represents a symbiosis of two terms that up to a certain level we can say define each other. However, semantically the terms come to describe a field of interference, theoretically interdisciplinary, since basically the two terms intercondition each other. All this in the sense that we cannot have a positive state of health without practicing physical activities, or we cannot practice physical activities if we are not healthy. Until recently, the two notions: physical exercise and physical activity, were assimilated as synonymous. Thus, physical exercise, as the main means of achieving the objectives of physical education and sport, represents a "systematic and conscious repeated motor act" (Cârstea Gh.2000:12), or "motor action with instrumental value, conceived and programmed in order to achieve the objectives of physical education and sport" (Dragnea A., Bota A.1999:17).

The notion of physical activity encompasses the entire range of physical manifestation of the body, therefore maintaining a state of health can be determined not only by practicing different physical exercises in a more or less organized setting, jumping sports, but also by different physical activities carried out in daily life. Thus, **physical activity** is defined as "movement of the body due to contraction of skeletal muscles, which have the effect of consuming energy over basal metabolism" (Caspersen et. al. 1985: 126).

The relationship between physical activity and health is materialized by the value of the ratio between the energy consumption achieved (output), usually in 24 hours, and the amount of nutrients ingested (input), having direct implications on body weight control. Depending on how we operate with the balance between the two variables we can have three situations:

1. **weight loss** – the individual loses weight:
 $input < output$ - (consume more than ingest)
2. **weight maintenance**
 $input = output$ - (energy value of ingested food equals energy value of physical activity performed)
3. **weight gain** – the individual gains weight
 $input > output$ - (more is ingested than consumed through physical activity)

2. TYPES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES THAT CAN BENEFIT HEALTH

Physical activity can be classified in different ways, depending on its type, intensity, and purpose, and can have two types of determinations: mechanical and metabolic. Thus, depending on the mechanical stresses, we have isometric or static contractions (which maintain the length of the muscle fiber), and isotonic or dynamic contractions (which maintain tension within the muscle fiber). From a metabolic point of view we have two types of determinations of muscle contraction: with oxygen consumption – aerobic effort, and with oxygen duty – anaerobic effort. Whether an activity is aerobic or anaerobic depends on the intensity level at which the activity is performed.

In everyday life, most activities include both types of contractions. Which is why classifying physical activities can best be done in terms of their main purpose. Thus, following studies conducted in the USA (CDC, 1998), specialists have highlighted 4 categories of physical activities, classified according to their purpose:

1. *occupational* (work-related);
2. *domestic* (housework, garden, childcare);
3. *transport* (walking or cycling in order to get somewhere);
4. *leisure time* (time for recreation, practicing hobbies, sports, or various physical exercises).

I mention that leisure activities can be subdivided into categories such as competitive sports, recreational activities and exercises. If until recently the terms "physical activity" and "exercise" were considered synonymous, today the term "physical exercise" defines only a category of physical

activities, those that are "planned, structured, repetitive and purposeful" (Caspersen, Powell, Christensen 1985).

The beneficial effects on the body are not manifested only after practicing physical education or sports, which is why the same source presents, as an example, a series of daily activities that can have beneficial effects on the body, under the conditions of practicing with an optimal intensity for each of us, depending on the level of training or the level of mastery of that skill. In this idea, in order to obtain the sanogenetic effects of these activities, the relationship between the intensity and duration of the effort performed is inversely proportional.

The literature mentions that a moderate intensity exercise corresponds to an amount of 150 calories (kcal) per day or 1000 calories per week.

3. EFFECTS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The systematic practice of physical exercises and sports by amateurs contributes to the gradual installation of the state of optimal physical shape or fitness – which according to specialists (Lupu I., 2004, 20) is known as "the 4 S model", after the English names, namely:

- **Strenght** – physical strength.
- **Stamina** – **vigor** (physical endurance);
- **Suppleness** – physical suppleness;
- **Skills** – physical skill.

The term "fitness" or "physical fitness" describes the body's ability to perform daily tasks vigorously, quickly, with sufficient energy, without getting tired" (Caspersen et. al. 1985:128).

Depending on the type of physical activities performed, fitness has specific characteristics. Thus, the physical condition when practicing physical activities for health is characterized by the following:

1. Acquiring cardio-respiratory or aerobic endurance, which means the body's ability to sustain intense physical activity for long periods of time.
2. Improving flexibility, coordination of movements and maintaining balance, materialized in increasing the ability of a joint to perform a complete movement.
3. Improvement of muscle strength, which refers to the maximum amount of effort endured by a muscle, at a single stress, at a single effort.
4. Increasing muscle strength, the ability of some muscle groups to perform a sustained effort over a long period of time.
5. Classification of the body composition index, in average values, according to age, height and weight.

In the same large-scale paper, elaborated by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 1996, specialists in the United States mention a series of **benefits that regular physical activity** has in combating or preventing risk factors for disease or even death, such as:

1. Reducing the risk of premature death.
2. Reducing the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease.
3. Reducing the risk of diabetes.
4. Reducing the risk of having hypertension.
5. Reducing the risk of contracting colon cancer.
6. It helps reduce hypertension in people with hypertension.
7. Reduces mental states of depression and anxiety.
8. Helps control body mass.
9. It helps grow and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints.
10. It helps the elderly to move safely without the risk of falling and having fractures.
11. Promotes mental well-being.

At the same time, the lack of regular physical activity can contribute to the early onset of some diseases, especially cardiovascular, but any increase in the level of these activities will bring health benefits. The benefits of exercise, from preventing disease to increasing self-confidence, are hard to ignore and are as follows:

- a. improve mood and self-image, reducing depression and anxiety;
- b. fights chronic diseases, controls blood pressure, cholesterol levels by increasing HDL ("good" cholesterol) and lowering LDL ("bad" cholesterol), also helping to prevent diabetes and osteoporosis;
- c. helps maintain weight control by burning calories, the effort should not be of high intensity nor require a lot of practice time (climbing stairs, walking, jogging, compensatory exercises during work breaks);
- d. have a role in improving the respiratory, vascular system and optimal functioning of the heart; It provides a peaceful sleep, helping concentration, productivity and mood, being recommended to be executed during the afternoon.

Sufficient physical activity of 50 minutes walking, 30 minutes running at moderate tempo per day for 5 days a week, or 20 minutes running at a sustained pace 3 times a week, decreases the number of heart attacks, and the heart adapts more easily to variations in intensity of effort over time, it contracts better and becomes less sensitive to stressors. By practicing physical activities, blood pressure is maintained within normal limits and muscle mass develops. The benefits of physical activities are valid for all categories of people regardless of gender or age, in children and adolescents it favors harmonious development, and in adults and elderly people practicing a light sport provides a maintenance of physical and mental tone. People with various diseases, but especially those with cardiovascular problems, are not completely forbidden to practice physical activities, a well-selected activity allows a better recovery after illness, thus avoiding relapse (walking, swimming, cycling, jogging, household activities, etc.).

By practicing physical exercises and sports, especially by adults, it can lead to the reversibility of some processes and decrease the risk of disease:

- a. the processes of muscle atrophy can be removed;
- b. unwanted deposits and uneven distribution of adipose tissue;
- c. improving the outfit;
- d. increase in general vital tone;
- e. lowering the risk of cardiovascular disease;
- f. elimination of diseases in the skeletal system.

In general, there are no contraindications for bodily activity, if it is adapted to the possibilities of each individual and if it is carried out following a medical examination. The means of physical culture are varied depending on the general physical training and represented by different branches of sports (body building, aerobic gymnastics, jogging, swimming, cycling, skiing, tennis, etc.). The practice of most of these physical activities involves a certain material support determined by expenses for paying various subscriptions or training sessions, for purchasing the necessary equipment, traveling or staying in the natural setting specific to different branches of sports.

4.INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

This paper tries to delimit the concept of "physical activities for health", and at the same time to establish its place in the context of the fight for health in today's society, but also of the specialized literature. Thus we can say:

1. Physical activities for health are a series of activities that, in addition to those commonly encountered as physical exercise or sports, also designate daily physical activities, intended for domestic activities, or for transport.

2. The main benefits of practicing this type of activities are reducing or limiting risk factors for disease or even death.
3. In order to obtain and maintain an optimal state of health, it is necessary and sufficient to practice physical activities for health at least 3 times a week, not being necessary to practice a sports activity at a high level.

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