

**JUST GET MOVING!**  
**The Health & Mental Health Benefits of Exercise**  
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It's a New Year's tradition: millions of Americans have resolved to lose weight, and signed up for the gym, once again. Gyms will be crowded for awhile, and some of us will lose a few pounds, but most will give up and go back to our sedentary ways after a few months.

One of the reasons people fail at this particular resolution is that they're not realistic about setting exercise and weight-loss goals. A recent article in the New York Times explored why it's so difficult to lose weight and keep it off ("[The Fat Trap](#)"). Seems it has to do with *homeostasis* - the body's natural tendency to maintain a steady state, and to revert back to that state after sudden dramatic changes in weight - which makes keeping it off even more difficult than losing it in the first place.

Another reason we fail is that we're focused on the wrong goal: while losing weight may be desirable, it's actually not as important to our health, mental health, and overall well-being as exercise itself. Here's a few examples of what the latest research shows:

["Exercise Hormone May Fight Obesity and Diabetes"](#) : *"A newly discovered hormone produced in response to exercise may be turning people's white fat brown."* (Brown fat cells are metabolically active, i.e. they burn calories, while white fat cells do not, which may explain why those who exercise regularly are more successful at keeping the pounds off).

["Physical fitness trumps body weight in reducing death risks"](#) : in a study of over 14,000 men, maintaining or improving physical fitness was linked to lower rates of death, even when body weight didn't change; yet a lower BMI (body mass index) was not.

["Too little exercise, too much TV tied to depression"](#) : in a study of 50,000 women, those who exercised the most were 20% less likely to get depression, while those who watched three hours or more of TV a day were 13% more likely to be diagnosed with depression.

So think in terms of making exercise the goal, with weight loss just one of the wonderful byproducts (improved sleep is another). Walking is the simplest, easiest and cheapest form of exercise. If you can do it for 30 minutes, five times a week, you'll have met the current national exercise guideline (150 minutes/week of moderate exercise).

One of my favorite ways to exercise is to take a walk in one of our wonderful regional parks. The East Bay Regional Parks district has just issued its 2012 Trails Challenge: walk, hike or bike on just 5 of the 20 listed trails, or log a total of 26.2 miles (that's a marathon!) to get a commemorative T-shirt and pin: [2012 Trails Challenge](#)

If being out in nature isn't your thing, try a yoga class, spinning or Zumba - or stay at home and exercise via a TV program, a DVD, or the Wii - just get moving!