

Exercise vs. Recreation

By Ken Hutchins

Exercise vs. Recreation is the most important and basic concept in exercise philosophy. However, it is rarely acknowledged or applied in any area of fitness or medicine.

Perhaps the most destructive as well as the most misunderstood concept in fitness today among researchers, the commercial health facilities, and the general public alike is the confusion of exercise and recreation.

We accept that both exercise and recreation are important in the overall scheme of fitness, and they overlap to a great degree. But to reap maximum benefits of both or either they must first be well-defined and then be segregated in practice.

Exercise, in a nutshell, is a process whereby the body performs work of a demanding nature. [Here, we use the first 13 words of the complete Definition as detailed in Chapter 15 of Super Slow®: The Ultimate Exercise Protocol. For convenience in this discussion we can temporarily dispense with the remaining qualifiers.] The key word here is "demanding." If an activity is not demanding, then it does not qualify as exercise.

If muscular loading is not meaningful to render momentary muscular failure within 1-3 minutes then the activity is not demanding.

Through exercise we are sending an ultimatum to the human body: "Your protective margins are inadequate. Adapt, enhance, improve, grow, increase, . . . or you will not survive." This is perceived as a threat by the body, although it can be effected safely through Super Slow Exercise.

Six Factors of Physical Fitness

1. Muscular Size, Strength and Endurance
2. Bone Strength
3. Cardiovascular Efficiency
4. Enhanced Flexibility
5. A Contribution to Body Leanness
6. Increased Resistance to Injury

Through exercise we hope to see a continuous improvement in these six factors of physical fitness. If we do not see this improvement, then exercise is either piecemeal or non-existent.

First and foremost, we hope to increase muscle size, strength, and endurance. We mention these together because, in a matter of speaking, they are one-in-the-same.

And if we can assume the body to be logical then bone strengthening should result from muscular strengthening.

Perhaps cardiovascular fitness is then desired. Realize that the only efficient route to working the vascular system is to find the best method to strengthen the muscles. The vascular system exists primarily to service the muscles. Improved muscular strength should strongly correlate with improved vascular efficiency.

The fourth factor is enhanced flexibility. Note that I am careful not to say "increased flexibility." Increased flexibility is contraindicated for many people. And enhanced flexibility may indeed mean less flexibility in some cases.

The next factor is a contribution to body leanness. Many people exercise with the mistaken belief that exercise burns a

significant number of extra calories. One pound of human fat can support the energy demands of running 35-45 miles, probably more. This would require the average man to run for 6-8 hours. He would burn the calories he could easily ingest in as many minutes. If one exercises only to burn extra calories his time is not worth much.

Many charts and computer programs in aerobic equipment suggest that hundreds of calories are burned as a result of their respective activities. These references fail to distinguish between the number of calories expended during the activity AND the EXTRA calories expended as a result of the activity. Realize that to assess this you must first subtract out the calories you would have burned as a result of your typical daily routine without the respective activity.

Most of fat-loss emphasis depends on caloric control. Exercise remains essential, however, for the purpose of minimally maintaining and hopefully increasing muscle size and strength. Muscle is the primary modifiable factor that affects your basal metabolism. Muscle is the secondary determinant _ only after your bones _ of your shape (figure). And only by strength training do you impose discriminate weight loss. Without emphasis on muscular strength, you lose weight but indiscriminately. You lose more than fat _ your muscles, even vital organ tissue as well. Other activities often construed as exercise do not impose the desired discriminate weight loss. [Please read Exercise . . . and its Role in Reducing Fat - available from Super Slow Systems.]

The last factor, increased resistance to injury, is a bonus. It should follow from the first five factors. It should go without saying that these factors should lead to safer movement in any activity.

Recreation, on the other hand is a different matter altogether. It is fun, pastime activities, a diversion from daily routine. And recreation is very important to our mental health.

If we surveyed the infinite variety of activities that might be recreational to somebody, they would fall somewhere on this imaginary continuum. At one end are those activities that impart little or no exercise effect; and at the opposite end are those more-athletic activities that possess a more-dramatic exercise effect, though that effect from recreational activities is always marginal and incomplete.

All of these activities or topics are recreation or can be to some individuals in some situations:

Checkers, jogging, skiing, walking, baseball, football, basketball, swimming, wrestling, hockey, rugby, reading, gardening, darts, bowling, music, sledding, hunting, flying, skydiving, racing, sex, eating, cycling, knitting, drawing, writing, calculus, archery, golf, SCUBA, television, cricket, racquetball, tennis, astronomy, archeology, horseshoes, dancing, weight lifting, bird watching, flying kites, model trains, photography, mountain climbing, catching alligators, mowing the grass, building exercise equipment, a job of any kind, tracking progress in an exercise program or almost any activity under the sun....

None of them are exercise, per se. Exercise may be a reason for performing some of them, but in all cases exercise takes a remote back seat to hundreds of psychological and sociological priorities. Just because an activity elevates your heart rate or elevates your blood pressure or fatigues you or induces labored breathing or makes you sore or makes you sweat, do not assume that you have meaningfully productive and worthwhile exercise. You can have all of these exercise effects without qualifying for exercise. Exercise effect does not assume effective exercise. The essence of exercise assumes a purpose of physical improvement. If the activity does not promote a physical improvement -- primarily correlated to increased muscular strength -- then it is not exercise.

The confusion regarding exercise and recreation can be traced to our beginnings. Certainly, when our prehistoric ancestors performed any activity, there was a mixture of purpose. An activity served as defense, combat, education, honing survival skills, recreation, sport, competition, as well as some degree of exercise. It is no wonder that we come down to a 20th-century man and woman who cannot distinguish between the two.

The simultaneous development of exercise and recreation leads us to three wrong assumptions: that any movement or activity in and of itself constitutes exercise; that recreation constitutes exercise; and that exercise should be fun. You often hear these popular though incorrect statements in the literature and discussions supposedly regarding exercise.

We have recently recognized that there are five distinct differences between exercise and recreation.

Five Distinctions Between Exercise & Recreation

Exercise

Logical
Universal
General
Physical
Not Fun

Recreation

Instinctive
Personal
Specific
Mental
Fun

Logical/Instinctive: Exercise is a logical strategy to dupe the protective mechanisms of the body. Properly applied, exercise requires a clinically-controlled setting to check our instincts. Exercise necessarily pits the intellect against the instincts. Recreation is illogical. It is instinctual. It is whimsical. It is activity that we would prefer to do.

Universal/Personal: Exercise is based on the muscular and joint functions of the human body, and all members of the species, Homo Sapiens, have the same muscular and joint functions. Therefore, the general principles and application of exercise are the same for every human being on the planet. Exercise is therefore universal. In a general sense, exercise is the same for everybody.

Recreation, on the other hand, is personal, and very so. The activity you choose as recreation may be different than that I choose, and this is as it should be.

General/Specific: With regard to skill acquisition, exercise is general. Improved strength, endurance, and resistance to injury are general improvements throughout the human body that will contribute to the performance of any activity to which the improved body is applied.

But skill, per se, is specific to the task performed. Proficiency in a task is improved by exact rehearsal of the task. In the last twenty years much has been publicized about specificity in exercise. There is no such thing as specificity in exercise. Specificity is the exclusive domain of motor learning discipline. (See Chapter 9 of Super Slow®: The Ultimate Exercise Protocol.)

Physical/Mental: There are many intellectual aspects of exercise. These include the learning of the exercise movements, motivation, and concentration to achieve adequate intensity. And I grant that there are dramatic psychological benefits from the exercise. But the initial reasons for performing exercise are purely physical.

The initial purpose of recreation is mental health.

And if exercise is performed properly in a clinically-controlled environment, then it is not fun. Exercise is not supposed to be fun. If it is fun, then you should suspect that something is wrong.

Recreation is supposed to be fun. Fun is the first requirement of recreation.

There are three other requirements of recreation that we owe ourselves to acknowledge:

- Are we aware of the dangers of the chosen recreational activity?
- Do we accept the dangers?
- And are we willing to prepare to protect ourselves from those dangers through the process of exercise?

The mistake is that most of us attempt to condition ourselves through the recreational activity.

As a result, more than 20-million injuries were sustained last year as a result of exercise, recreational, and fitness activities in this country. That is more casualties, if you will, sustained in one year than the United States has sustained in all wars to date. James Michener, who originally provided us these figures (back when the annual figure was 17-million), states that football alone injures 86% of all high school participants and 28 students are killed each year.

Now, if high school physics could expect to maim 86% of the students each year and kill 25 or 30, I suspect that physics would not remain in the curriculum. And if 20-million people were injured in this country as a result of some dread disease such as polio or tuberculosis or AIDS or as the result of some criminal element, we would organize and band together. We would host telethons, do research, raise money, deliver speeches, and hold rallies to stamp out and denounce the villain. But exercise? . . . that's OK.

And remember, most of these activities are performed in the pursuit of health.

Along the same vein, it was recently stated that if we could instantaneously exact from every American a number that represents his fitness status on a scale from -10 to +10 and average them all together, then the average would be about -4. And if everyone stopped whatever they considered to be exercise and healthy activity, then the average would rise to zero.

Important Semantics

Exercise has immense potential benefit - probably more than what most of us suspect though we purport to sing its praises. But I have little confidence that more than a handful of Americans are reaping these benefits.

Most of the problem stems from a misunderstanding of what exercise can do. Here we have an important play on words involving four words: *Do*, *Stimulate*, *Prevent* and *Produce*. It goes like this:

Activity serving as exercise can *Do* only three things:

1. Activity, if it is intense-enough to qualify as exercise, serves to stimulate. This stimulus is that ultimatum that we discussed earlier.

2. Activity, whether it qualifies as exercise or not, carried beyond the minimum amount required to illicit the stimulus; serves to retard, minimize, or totally prevent the beneficial improvements we seek. Prevention of benefits is the second thing that exercise can do.

3. Activity, whether it qualifies as exercise or not, can produce something directly. And it can directly produce only one thing - something totally undesirable - injury.

Therefore, exercise does not produce benefits. The human body produces the benefits. The body grows. The body adapts. The body enhances and increases.

And the body produces benefits **IF** the stimulus of exercise is present; and **IF** the body is then permitted adequate rest, nutrition, and perhaps most-importantly, time, in order to produce said improvements; and **IF** the body is not destroyed in the stimulation process.

This is our policy: Understand the difference between exercise and recreation. Do not try to make exercise enjoyable. Do not try to make recreation exercise.

If you confuse and mix exercise and recreation, you grossly compromise any forthcoming physical benefits of the exercise; you destroy a large degree of the fun that recreation should bestow; and you make both more dangerous than they need be. Accept both for what they are.

If you can place exercise and recreation in their proper perspective, the quality of your life will markedly improve.



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