



Mars versus Venus

In the world of health and fitness, are men really from Mars and women from Venus? Here's a quick look at some common men's and women's health issues and consider the role exercise can play...

Coronary Heart Disease was the number one killer in the UK until recently (it's now been replaced by cancer). The fitter and less fat you are, the less likely your risk. Women with a 90cm or greater waist measurement, and men with a 100cm or greater measurement are at greater risk than those with slimmer waists. Regular exercise – particularly of a moderate to high intensity, that's between 70-85% of maximum heart rate – has been shown to be the most effective at strengthening the heart and reducing high blood pressure (hypertension) and cholesterol.

Note: if you are new to exercise then you should start with lower exercise intensities to avoid injury and help you gain 'exercise confidence.'

Hypertension can be significantly reduced through exercise. Research from the World Health Organisation emphasized the importance of high blood pressure as a major risk factor for both CHD and stroke. Men under 64 have a greater risk of hypertension compared to women. More specifically, Indian, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Irish men are at greater risk of heart disease and stroke. If everyone with high blood pressure lowered it to 140/90 by regularly exercising, 62000 lives would be saved.

Cancer

A great deal of research indicates that exercise can combat certain cancers in males and females – notably breast, prostate, colon and kidney cancers. Obesity is considered a key causal factor. Obesity is defined as having a body mass index score over 30.

The Harvard Centre for Cancer Control estimated that at least 15% of colon cancers could be prevented by 30 minutes' daily exercise. Although the exact mechanisms are not fully understood, it is believed that exercise reduces the risks of certain cancers by controlling hormone levels and reducing body fat levels.

Breast Cancer affects 1 in 8 women in Australia. It's caused by a hormonal imbalance. Only 10% of breast cancers have a hereditary link. The production of too much of the female hormone oestrogen has been identified as a causal factor. To be more exact - after the menopause, the hormone oestradiol (the most potent type of oestrogen) forms within the body's fatty tissues. This produces high levels of oestrogen as the blood circulates. Regular exercise is seen to lower oestrogen levels and can reduce the risk of developing breast cancer by up to 30%.

The risk of **cancer of the colon** is reduced by 25 to 40% for the more active, compared with the inactive. Research indicates that the more intense the exercise the greater the risk reduction.

The risk of developing **prostate cancer** can be reduced by 10-30% by regular exercise.

Osteoporosis literally means a 'thinning of the bones.' Although it primarily affects women, men can also be affected. Regular weight bearing exercise can significantly reduce the effects of osteoporosis by strengthening bones. It is particularly important for children to exercise in order to produce strong bones that will deteriorate less in later life. However, virtually all research indicates that regular exercise at any stage in life will bolster bones. Women should not neglect weight training because of this.