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Reduce your heart disease risk by 40%

Finding the time to exercise is the biggest hurdle, however, when we make it a priority the health benefits can be enormous

Incorporating a regular exercise routine into a busy life has reaped rewards for Michael Sant who has reduced his cardiovascular risk by 40 per cent in just six months.

The 68 year old Good Health Publications publisher of *Healthy&heartWise* is fitter, stronger and healthier.

He has reduced his weight by 4kg, waist circumference by 4cm, lowered his resting heart rate by almost 10 beats per minute and reduced his blood pressure by 4mmHg systolic and his chronic knee problem (recommended for surgery) is pain-free.

"I feel very good," Sant said. "I feel like I'm achieving something as well as improving my physical wellbeing and fitness."

Sant's primary goal was to become fitter but he also wanted to lower his pre-hypertensive blood pressure to avoid antihypertensive medication. He takes cholesterol lowering medication.

After just three months of exercise, he had lowered his blood pressure by 13mmHg systolic to a more acceptable level of 132/82. Although it has stabilised now to 140/70, his decrease in blood pressure is significant in that he has achieved a similar reduction to what can be achieved with first line blood pressure medications, according to his exercise physiologist, Joanna Jaques of Sydney's The Exercise Clinic.

"Regular aerobic exercise can lower systolic blood pressure by an average 4mmHg and a diastolic by 2.5mmHg which is comparable to the effect of initial blood pressure medications," Jaques said.

"The blood pressure lowering effects can be even greater for those with higher levels of blood pressure – which is good news for those managing hypertension.

"There is also a short term benefit of a single exercise session with blood pressure remaining lower for up to 22 hours after."

Jaques said exercise duration and frequency as opposed to intensity were the most important factors in achieving a blood pressure benefit. Aiming to complete at least 30 minutes of continuous aerobic activity and making it regular, on five or more days per week, had been shown to be most effective.

"The exercise itself doesn't need to be vigorous just to increase your heart and breathing rate above a light level!"

Sant visits The Exercise Clinic three times a week and does a supervised program of aerobic (treadmill, exercise bike and cross trainer) and resistance based (strength) exercise to optimise body composition and health outcomes. He spends 180 minutes a week on light exercise and 200 minutes on moderate activity and he includes some incidental walking exercise by wearing a pedometer.

While he aims for the elusive 10,000 steps a day, he is currently on 6212 steps, nearly double his initial steps at the start of the program, but finds it difficult to find the time each day to increase this any further.

Sant has improved his aerobic capacity, measured in metabolic equivalent units (METs) by 30 per cent thereby reducing his cardiovascular risk by 40 per cent. Recent research in Circulation suggests that for every 1 MET increase in exercise capacity there's an average 13% reduction in cardiovascular risk.

Regular moderate intensity exercise brings about greater health benefits

"Regular moderate intensity exercise brings about greater health benefits as the body adapts and improves its efficiency," Jaques said. Every three months Sant's progress is assessed by his exercise physiologist together with regular six monthly checkups with his GP.

"Changes in body composition such as increased muscle tissue and less body fat alongside lower blood pressure, cholesterol levels and a more efficient cardiovascular system, all reduce the risk of chronic illness and ensure we continue to manage and enjoy our daily activities.

"Exercise is much more than an energy burner and weight loss strategy. Exercise has a whole-body effect and its benefits are widespread including for the heart, blood vessels, muscles, bones, joints and even our mood.

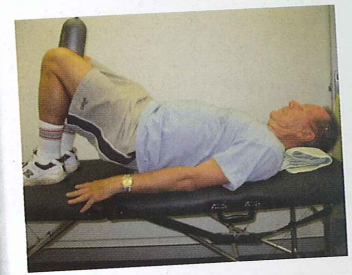
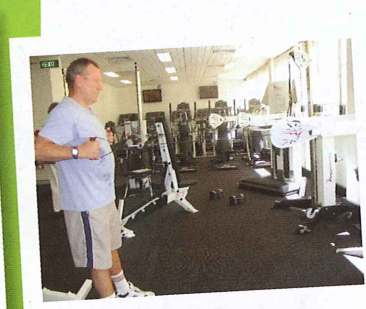
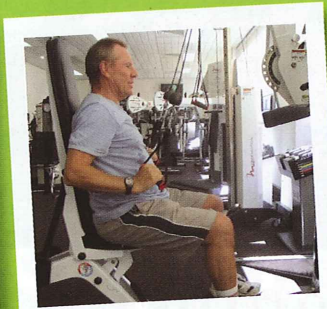
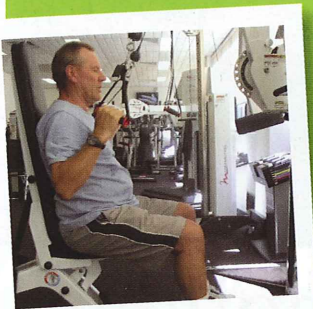
"To gain the most benefits, exercise needs to be part of your day, something that becomes routine and second nature as opposed to a program you do in the short term."

To visit an exercise physiologist, you will need a GP's or specialist's referral. Anyone with a chronic illness (heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, osteoporosis) is eligible to a Medicare rebate. A large majority of private health funds also provide a rebate.

Exercise physiologists prescribe exercise to bring about changes specifically targeted at a health problem area such as cholesterol levels, joint mobility, lean body mass, reducing weight and body fat, bone density, blood pressure and blood sugar levels.

Michael Sant's Program Progress

Outcome measure	Pre-exercise	3 months exercise	5 months exercise
Weight	90 Kg	87.5 Kg	86 Kg
Waist circumference	107 cm	105 cm	103 cm
Waist to hip ratio	1.0	0.99	0.99
Resting blood pressure	145/85	132/82	145/82 140/70 (6 months)
Resting heart rate	74 b.min-1	67 b.min-1	65 b.min-1
Physical activity levels			
Light intensity	150 min/week	180 min/week	180 min/week
Moderate intensity	150 min/week	240 min/week	200 min/week
Aerobic capacity (METs)	6.3	8.1	9.5
Lower body strength (Squat)	½ range (knee pain)	Full range (no knee pain)	Full range (no knee pain)
Upper body strength (Standing pull)	20 Kg (5 repetitions)	30 Kg (5 repetitions)	30 Kg (12 repetitions)



Increase your resistance

Are you ready to reduce your health risk? You can follow some of Michael's resistance (strength) exercises below or you can take our four week Shape Up for Spring challenge on page 42.

Standing row

Major muscle group: Upper back

Action: Start with arms extended, pull to waist - squeezing shoulder blades back

Posture cues: "Shoulders down and back"

Standing chest press

Major muscle group: Chest

Action: Start with elbows bent, push to straighten arms-keeping chest up

Posture cues: "Chest out"

Lower abdominal cycle

Major muscle group: Abdominals and low back

Action: Place hands under lower back curve. Draw lower abdominals in to maintain pressure on your hands as you lift and straighten each leg in a cycling motion.

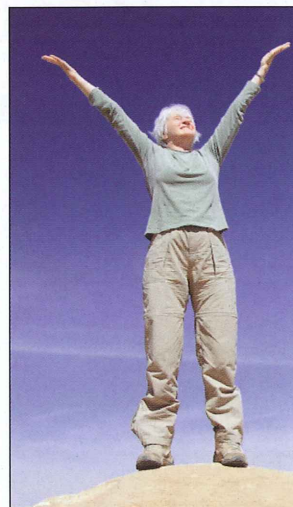
Posture cues: "Draw belly in towards spine"

Michael's exercise program includes a series of resistance-based exercises to increase lean body mass, functional strength and postural alignment. To optimise health benefits each exercise should be performed for 10-12 repetitions, 2-3 times, at a moderate level of exertion. Exercises can be performed with pin-loaded weights or elastic resistance bands following a 5-10 min aerobic warm-up. (Please speak to an Exercise Physiologist if you are managing a specific medical condition prior to attempting these exercises)

Michael,
Congratulations on
your achievement!

We can help you as well if:

- you have been diagnosed with heart disease, high blood pressure or diabetes
- you are overweight and have no energy
- or you have aching joints or had previous surgery



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