

The secret to better health? A bit more oomph

I love a skip. Even a small one, of the kind we have parked up outside. A skip says you mean business and, as we approach April, isn't it traditionally a time for a spring clean?

Domesticity has come to me very late in life. There will always be attachments unattached and buttons never pressed, but I get by. I enjoy the physicality of housework but can it really count as part of your exercise quota? Many would say it does. I would argue it doesn't.

Housework does not, and should not, make us out of breath and doesn't exercise have to do that to count?

Well, with notebooks at the ready we have new and very exciting research to examine. The truth about exercise may be a surprise.

Guidelines state that an average person should do 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week to stay healthy.

The flaw in the plan? Well, we are all so individual. You only have to look up and you will notice how very different we all are.

The boffins at the University of Nottingham have spent four years studying 1,000 people to see how the group responded to exercise. They were prescribed four hours of exercise per week over a 20-week period.

A shocking truth emerged. Exercise, of the huff and puff variety, doesn't work for everyone. There is a new classification out there – the 'non-responders'. This means you could run up a steep hill every day for six months and at the end of six months be no quicker than you were on that first day. Alarming.

Naturally there are those who will run up that very same hill on day one and by day six see an improvement. The scientists want to understand why.

They have discovered that short, explosive bursts of energy for no longer than one minute can significantly improve

your health, arguing against spending hours exercising to achieve the same results.

Should you fancy a go at an explosive burst it is vital that you consider your exercise history and behave appropriately.

Going full charge ahead from a standing start will do you no good at all. At the very least keep it private, or you may draw a crowd.

In my perfect world we would all be laboratory-tested and prescribed the exercise we need to stay healthy.

Clinical? Yes, but imagine knowing exactly what will work for you or, more to the point, what wouldn't. Your exercise programme would be tailored to optimise your efforts and time. Your fitness prescription.

Being classed as a 'non-responder' would be quite a blow – not one you could take much positivity from. Should you have your suspicions and wonder "is this me?", then help is at hand.

The scientists want to help these flailing souls. They want to make sense of it all and change our preconceived ideas. They want to say to the 'non-responders' that they were right all along – they really can't improve their puff no matter how hard they try. They can, though, still improve their health and live for longer.

The message coming through loud and clear from the scientists is this: don't sit down for longer than one hour at any one time. Stand on one leg, kneel, crouch, pace – anything but sit down. This works. The 'non-responders' significantly improved their health by simply moving. Not by explosive bursts of energy but by keeping their bodies actively mobile – just doing their day-to-day tasks with a bit more oomph.

So I was wrong. Housework does count. You could do some squats while folding your laundry or some lateral squeezes while you polish. Me? I will stick to the beginner level.

After all I am still just a novice. 



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