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# Exercising this year could play a critical role that may surprise you

By Bob Cairo | Special to the Coastal Point  
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Physical therapist Bob Cairo says committing to exercising in 2022 could have health benefits beyond the obvious.

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Happy New Year! Like so many of you, I am happy to see 2021 come to an end. I begin the new year with a wish that extends to all of us, for our national health challenges to give way to better news.

This leads me to my question for all of you: Did you include getting serious about exercise in your new year's resolutions? Since we started visiting here in the Coastal Point, I've asked you about it every year, and there's an important reason for it: Your health. That's why we're going to kickoff our first visit of 2022 with a conversation about one of the huge impacts of exercise that may surprise you.

You already know that exercise plays a big role in your health, but did you know that exercise plays a significant role in cancer prevention and improved survival for those diagnosed with certain cancers among us adults?

Exercise is very important for cancer prevention. It is particularly impactful in lowering the risk of seven very common cancers, including breast cancer, colon cancer, bladder cancer, stomach cancer, kidney cancer, cancer of the esophagus and endometrial cancer.

Now, think about this. Some medical experts are pointing to evidence that indicates that prolonged periods of inactivity like sitting for extending periods of time is a hazard to your health. It may increase your risk of some types of cancers. Those that have been mentioned include lung cancer, colon cancer and endometrial cancer.

It also has an impact on cancer survivors. Cancer survivors can realize important benefit from exercise. It plays a role in helping to improve survival after a diagnosis of cancers like breast, prostate and colon cancer. Medical professionals also say

that cancer patients who exercise during and after their cancer treatments will benefit with improvements related to fatigue, depression and anxiety, as well as to their physical functioning capabilities. It goes right to quality-of-life.

How much exercise do you need? Medical professionals don't have a clear answer, yet, on just how much exercise is needed, but I generally hear many recommending the American Heart Association guidelines of at least 150 minutes of at least moderate physical activity each week. They also suggest some resistance training for major muscle groups at least twice per week. What medical professionals tell us is the bottom line is that getting active and staying active is key for adults of every age and regardless of ability in making a difference in preventing cancer.

Here's a good way to look at it. If you start with realistic goals, begin at a reasonable pace and stay on track to reach your goals, you will see benefits. Together, let's start by setting one goal: Commit to working toward a goal of doing 150 minutes of exercise every week. Again, be realistic. You might only begin with 20 minutes of moderate exercise. But that's good. It's giving your body a chance to get accustomed to increasing activity and it gives you a starting point. Then, you increase to 30 minutes, and so on, until you reach your goal.

The most important thing you can do is not just talk about it or sit there, and agree that it makes sense. Start by putting together the right pieces to reach your goal.

So, what do you start with? You know the answer. Start with calling your doctor and making an appointment to talk about a plan. Bring a list of medications and supplements you are taking and write down any new developments or changes to your existing health conditions. Did you have a fall? Did you change your diet? Has your living situation changed? Write down all that information and bring it with

you, so that your doctor has a current, full picture in order to give you the best possible direction. Don't be surprised if your doctor recommends a supervised health program with a physical therapist.



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As we've discussed before, if your doctor refers you to a physical therapist, you can expect that your first visit will involve a complete evaluation and assessment, a review of the health information shared by your doctor and a straightforward conversation about your goals and next steps.

Talk about your challenges with your physical therapist. Share any concerns or issues. Get it all out on the table and as a result of that initial visit, you can expect that your physical therapist is going to create a program that works for your specific needs. That's important, because there is no such thing as one-size-fits-all. We all have our individual needs, issues and circumstances. All of these factors have to be taken into account.

Your physical therapist may recommend a combination of an individual program with a small-group program that incorporates your program elements. Some physical therapy groups will offer that kind of program. It's something that might

work for you, depending on your particular situation. At Tidewater, we've found that many people find they like being part of a group, and the added benefits that come with socializing with others and getting that mutual support in achieving goals.

I can tell you that I have always firmly believed that having a plan that has been created just for you will go a long way toward helping you meet your goals. Your physical therapist will look at all the options available to you to build that plan to help you get moving and stay on track to achieve a healthier lifestyle. The point is there are options, and with the right guidance, support and supervision, they can be safely addressed to help you achieve success.

Now, let's get one thing straight between us: I don't expect you to become obsessed with exercise, and I am not recommending that you do. I'm talking about common sense here. The reality is you're going to get a whole lot of benefits, in addition to those that come related to cancer. What I am urging you to do is to go for it. Stay consistent and don't quit. I am confident you're going to feel the difference.

I know you will also notice some of those other important benefits that we have talked about before. Exercise helps with your mental health. It will make you feel more relaxed, it will improve your mood and, on top of all, that it helps with your memory, because it makes your brain sharper.

So, what have you got to lose? Get going and make an investment in your health in 2022.

And one final thought: Count on me to be here to keep talking and sharing with you because together we can make things better in 2022.

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