

This article is from the monthly newsletter of 24/7 X-Press Fitness Center, located in Des Moines, Iowa. This is from the August 2009 issue.

Exercise Like an Athlete

I don't know how many times I've heard the recommendation that you need 30 minutes of moderate exercise three times per week to get in shape and be healthy, but I've heard it a lot. Considering that most people don't even get this much, it's pretty good advice. But for someone who is looking to lose weight, add muscle or become more fit, 30 minutes of moderate exercise three times per week isn't going to get you very far. What do most people want out of their exercise program? It's one to three things: 1) to be more lean, 2) to add muscle and 3) to be more fit and healthy. Now, think about your favorite athlete. Chances are s/he is 1) lean, 2) muscular and 3) fit and healthy. They have the things you want out of your exercise program yet that wasn't their main goal when they set out. They got that way by pursuing their sport. And I can tell you, they don't just exercise moderately 3 times a week for 30 minutes.

So, yes, athletes are lean, muscular and fit and healthy. Most of us don't need to be that fit, muscular or lean, and certainly most of us don't want to or can't afford to exercise and train as much as athletes do. But we would all like to be a little bit more like them. Here are a few lessons we can learn from them to apply to our own exercise programs to make them more effective.

- 1) Athletes train a lot. Depending on the sport, athletes can train anywhere from 10 to 30 hours per week. Even athletes who's events are very short, like sprinters, may train a couple hours a day. Unless you are like them and being paid to work out, you can't imagine working out that much, nor do you need to. However, to see positive results you should expect to exercise at least 2-3 hours per week. Before you gasp, you need to realize that 1.7 hours a week represents 1% of the time in a week. Can't you find 1-2% of your time to spend investing on yourself?
- 2) Athletes train using intervals. Marathoners don't plod along at 3-4 mph, unless they are cooling down. Cyclists don't pedal along at 16 mph unless its an easy, recovery day. Almost all athletes involved with a cardiovascular sport (running, swimming, cycling, etc) do interval training. Interval training has a lot of forms, and they all include varying the speed and intensity of the work being done. Let's say you jog on the treadmill at 5 mph for 30 minutes. Instead you could alternate and run at 7 mph for one minute then back off and jog or walk at 4 mph for one minute, continually alternating intensity throughout the workout. Or you could keep the speed constant and increase and decrease the elevation of the treadmill. This does you more good than going one constant speed because you are forcing yourself to work harder than normal even though its for short periods. If you want to get faster, you have to train faster. If you can run at 5 mph, you will never get faster if you always run at 5 mph. Intervals also have the advantage of making the workout go by faster.
- 3) Athletes needing strength don't do lots of reps with low weights. They use heavy weights and lift them a few times. Heavy weights increase strength most effectively. If you want to get stronger, make sure you do your strength workouts with increasing weights. Have you been doing the same workout with the same weight for the past several months? If so, I bet you aren't getting stronger.
- 4) Athletes tend to be pretty particular about what they eat. Have a gang of marathoners over for dinner some night and you will see what I mean. They'll be at least one vegetarian, one who doesn't eat sugar, others who don't eat fat, and they all pay attention to what they eat and how much, and it can be a lot! They view food as fuel. They eat to exercise, not the other way around. I'm not suggesting you become obsessive about food or to not enjoy it, but it will help you lose or maintain your weight if you pay more attention to what you eat, making sure most of what you eat is healthful and full of nutrients, and only eat what your body tells you it wants and needs, no more.
- 5) Athletes have goals, and these goals are about performance, not about weight, muscle or time spent in the gym. They are driven to train because they know they need to in order to be able to

compete with other athletes. Their bodies are the result of their training for their performance goals. Exercising for the sake of exercise is not very motivating. If you are bored with your exercise or struggle to come in, even though you know it's good for you, consider setting a goal for yourself to provide an external stimulus for you to exercise. Think about signing up for a 10K run, RAGBRAI or even just set a goal to be in better shape for your next vacation. That will be more motivating and help keeping exercising when you would rather be doing something else. Without goals, it is difficult to push yourself to make progress and is impossible to know if you have made any progress.

Because you are spending your precious time exercising, you might as well get the most benefit from it. If you would like to beef up your workouts to make sure you are getting the most out of them, consider signing up for a personal training session with David. I can help you get more out of your time spent here. Give me a call at 515-689-1254.

Quick Fit Tip of the Month: Have you ever noticed the signs at zoos: “Do Not Feed the Animals”? Zoo animals are kept on strict diets for health purposes. Human food isn't good for them and may harm them. *So why is it good enough for us???*

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