

Aetna's Wellness Podcast Series – Physical Activity and Heart Health

Interviewee Bio: Bryan Powell is a health coach at Aetna. Bryan has been doing health coaching for seven years. Prior to that, Bryan was a personal trainer and group exercise instructor. He has a master's degree in exercise physiology, chronic disease, and obesity. He also has a certification in exercise physiology from the American College of Sports Medicine and is a certified tobacco treatment specialist

SAMANTHA LYALL

Hi, everyone, and thank you for listening to our Podcast series Focus on Wellness. This is a series where we will talk about current health and wellbeing topics to help you no matter where you are in your own health journey. My name is Samantha Lyall, and here with me today is Bryan Powell, who is a health coach here at Aetna. Bryan has been doing health coaching for seven years. Prior to that, Bryan was a personal trainer and group exercise instructor. Thanks for joining us today, Bryan.

BRYAN POWELL

Hi Sam. Thanks for having me.

SAMANTHA LYALL

Often times, we are bombarded with messaging about living a healthier lifestyle and the need to exercise, but it's hard; life gets in the way. It's hard to get motivated and so on.. So, to begin, Bryan, can you share why being active is so important for a healthy heart?

BRYAN POWELL

Sure. You know, certainly being active is really important just for overall wellness and to have a healthy heart. You know, exercise and activity can help lower blood pressure, it can help strengthen muscles including your heart. It can lower stress; it can reduce your risk of developing diabetes. It can also slow risk factors of diabetes, and in some cases actually stop it altogether. It can also lower high cholesterol, and can contribute to weight loss, which can also lower stress on the heart. So, really activity and exercise are really beneficial in a number of different ways.

SAMANTHA LYALL

As you listed many of the different benefits of being active for a healthy heart, I'm wondering are there some activities that are better than others?

BRYAN POWELL

Well, Sam, there really aren't any activities that are better than others. It's really about just choosing something that you can see yourself doing consistently. You know, I always tell my clients that –, whatever it is that you enjoy doing, to go out and do it and really build a plan around doing that. Whether that is running or doing group exercise or Yoga, or – you know, going for those brisk walks, or – you know, whatever it is. It's just to really choose an activity that you can see – that you can really see yourself doing consistently, and that will help you to stick with it

SAMANTHA LYALL

Yeah. That makes a lot of sense that it'd be easier to stay committed when you like it. And so, with that, is there a recommended standard about how much physical activity you suggest someone try to fit into their weekly routine?

BRYAN POWELL

Sure. The first thing that you would like to do is always check with your health practitioner just to make sure that you are healthy enough to begin any type of exercise program. And as far as the recommendations go, you want to shoot for about a 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity exercise; that breaks down to about maybe 30 minutes a day.

When I say moderate intensity, it's really kind of hard to explain, so I really always tell my clients about the talk test. T-A-L-K. Talk test. And the talk test is a really easy gauge to let you know if you are exercising in that moderate intensity zone. So, say the conversation that you and I are having right now – this would kind of be a low-intensity sort of exercise. And what we are shooting for is moderate intensity. And so, you want to have to take a breath every couple of words, and that's really going to gauge of where you are in your moderate intensity zone. And you want to get about 150 minutes per week or more of that type of exercise.

SAMANTHA LYALL

So, Bryan, you talked about 150 minutes several times now. And many of us have the best intentions to exercise but may find it hard to make the time. So, what are some ways that we can fit physical activity into our daily routines?

BRYAN POWELL

You know, I work with clients all the time that are really busy, and it's hard for them to set aside that time on a weekly basis to be able to get that exercise in. So, I really talk with them about maybe breaking up bouts of exercise throughout the day. Maybe you are able to get in –part of that time in the morning and part of that time in the afternoon, or – and midday, and you will be getting the same benefits as doing your exercise all at once. And so, if your schedule is too busy to get it all in at once, certainly trying to break up those bouts of exercise is good.

SAMANTHA LYALL

So, I think that's really important to highlight, Bryan. Some people may think about exercise as having to on the treadmill for 30 minutes, but it doesn't need to be that.

BRYAN POWELL

Right. Everyone always thinks that you have to go to a gym and –walk on a treadmill or do the elliptical to be able to get in that exercise. And really, you know, you can make your exercise as creative as you like to be. It's really about trying to get active. And so, that can be taking a walk at lunchtime or after dinner –either by yourself or with a partner or a child. Using the stairs instead of the elevator or walking to a co-worker's office instead of calling or emailing, parking the car further away, and –walking a little bit further in the morning

when you go to work. And just maybe consider tracking your steps. A lot of phones now have pedometers built right in to them. So, it's really easy for – for a lot of people just to get up and really be active throughout the day.

SAMANTHA LYALL

Right. So, we've talked a lot about physical activity. I'm wondering, Bryan, if you share some of the other ways to have a heart-healthy lifestyle?

BRYAN POWELL

Sure. Really, it's about not smoking, and limiting your weekly alcohol intake can really help you to be heart healthy. Having an overall healthy diet; trying to get in five servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Eating a diet that is low in fat; the recommended whole grains and high fiber foods. And limiting your salt intake.

Then also creating a menu or shopping list before you go to the grocery store can be really helpful for you and reduce the risk of you having those impulse buys in the junk food aisles when you are going grocery shopping.

SAMANTHA LYALL

Yeah, I think that's a really cool trick, Bryan, talking about the grocery list. I think I picked that up from my mom, and I really try to stay to the outer perimeters of the store and load up on fruits and vegetables. And as we talk about exercise and eating healthy, I'm just wondering about the balance of it all. How important is nutrition to a heart-healthy lifestyle?

BRYAN POWELL

Yeah, nutrition is really a key piece in an overall heart-healthy lifestyle. So, you really want to focus in on that nutrition as well as that exercise, and with the combination of both of those, it's really going to help an individual stay at a healthy weight, and reach a healthy weight,

SAMANTHA LYALL

And so, outside of heart health, what are some other benefits of physical activity?

BRYAN POWELL

Again, as I mentioned earlier, really cutting down on those risk factors such as diabetes and high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Activity and exercise, and a healthy diet can really help you to lower your risk of developing any of those things. And also, just as – as the population ages –if you are active and eat a healthy diet, you are... you increase your chances of having just a better quality of life. 00:09:06

SAMANTHA LYALL

So, at this point, Bryan, are there any other tips you would like to share?

BRYAN POWELL

Sure. So, one of the things that we mentioned earlier about exercise and not having that time throughout the day. It could be that you – maybe you want to have an exercise buddy or something like that to help you when you are first starting out with a program. And then, I also talk with my clients about not starting off too quickly with exercise. A lot of people try to go out and – you know, automatically shoot for that 150 minutes per week of exercise, and they end up missing a day or two, and then a day or two turns into a week, and then all of the sudden, they are not exercising at all anymore. And you know, to avoid that burnout and to avoid being too overwhelmed – you know, I always recommend that you start out ten minutes or 15 minutes or whatever you feel comfortable starting with, and just kind of developing a routine and a base for yourself before you start building in that additional exercise minutes per week. And that really helps individuals – I find – with really sticking the routine for the long term.

And then also, many of us live in cold climates, so it's really hard for us to get outside during those colder months, so really utilizing –workout videos and apps can be really helpful for a lot of people to really stay active during those colder times. And there are a number of different apps and workout videos out there that are available for people to take advantage of.

SAMANTHA LYALL

Great. Thanks, Bryan. I think those are really helpful tips about making sure that we are pacing ourselves, we have accountability buddies, and including technology into our routines. Thank you so much again for joining us, Bryan, and sharing information about how to stay active. And thank you to our listeners. Until next time, stay well.

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