

IJM Workshop 2 talking points

There are some big bad statistics out there, lying in wait for the unsuspecting peri- and post-menopausal woman:

- The biggest cause of death amongst post-menopausal women:
 - Heart attack – many of the symptoms of heart attack for women are not the same as those more readily recognized in men and the first indication that a woman is having a heart attack will be her death.
- Bone fracture rate and associated morbidity
- Risks of the visceral fat that accumulates around the middle – cancer, diabetes, cardiac
- Dementia and other cognitive decline
- Cancers – colo-rectal for example

What a lot of bad news. Let's change the subject...

What has resistance exercise ever done for me? Help from the audience please...

- It prevents sarcopenia or muscle wasting, a common condition in women over 60
- It protects against loss of bone density
- It improves heart and lung health, strengthening the heart muscle and helping to maintain good lung capacity and function, reducing the risk of heart disease.
- It helps regulate circadian rhythm, especially if done outside in the morning.
- It helps bowel motility – key in preventing stool accumulating in the large bowel, during which time excess oestrogen of the unhelpful kind is reabsorbed by the body and then has to be re-processed by the liver to remove it again.
- It improves insulin sensitivity – your body responds more readily to smaller amounts of insulin, reducing risk of Type 2 diabetes
- It protects against cognitive decline with research finding a good connection between strong and functional muscles and healthy brain function.
- It helps reduce stress – important for managing cortisol production, an excess of which interferes with the body's manufacture of other hormones that keep other systems in check, those that manage appetite and sleep for example, as well as disrupting the levels of oestrogen and progesterone that you are able to produce. Stress also has a negative effect on bone building/remodeling.
- Helps to reduce belly, or visceral fat due to the reduction in cortisol levels
- Can help to reduce the incidence and risk of lower back pain
- Reduces the risk of rotator cuff (shoulder) problems and foot issues such as plantar fasciitis both of which are common in women over 50.

Resistance-based exercise isn't *quite* everything

Other forms of activity are also highly beneficial and they all have a place in the mix: Yoga helps flexibility and can improve thoracic mobility which in turn helps with bowel movements. Pilates is great for core strength which can help with back pain and pelvic floor function. A brisk walk 5 – 7 times a week can be enough to manage back pain.

As a result of a regular exercise plan, people tend to make better decisions in other areas of life such as those around alcohol, food choices and smoking simply because they don't want to waste the efforts they are putting in to take exercise.

Be honest... *why are you doing this?*

You will have a reason for embarking on this programme now. Perhaps you are having issues with menopausal symptoms, perhaps you are aware that you can't eat and drink as freely as you would like without seeing effects that you're not happy with. Could it be something that you saw a family member or friend going through, that has made you think you need to take action. Anyone willing to share? Nicky's journey started with a mix of experiences: a photograph, a changing room incident and my mum's health issues. You will have your own.

What will make you keep doing it?

By and large, people do not find it motivational to do something now so that they feel the benefit in the future. It is as if our future selves are complete strangers to our current selves and we can do nothing to help someone we don't know. You may be able to take some short term action a bit like when you go on a strict diet, but like the restrictive diet sticking at something we don't really enjoy for a long time is just not realistic. This isn't uncommon so you have to be kind and understanding of this in yourself, just as you would be if one of your friends were to tell you of the difficulty she's having eating 1,000 calories per day in week three of her weight loss programme.

So it's no good for me to constantly remind you of heart attack statistics, or the bone fracture rate in older women, you have to feel there is a benefit to doing it NOW.

Let's cut to the chase then. What do you value for yourself right now? Your appearance maybe – being driven to have a flatter stomach or more toned arms is great because you'll be motivated to get your kit on and workout those bits and into the bargain, you'll be ticking all the other boxes such as the maintaining muscle mass or protecting your bone density. Make yourself an honest list.

Other ideas for ensuring you keep up with your good intentions include...
Buddying up with someone, be accountable and supportive to each other
You may have others that you know are especially effective for you.

Get to know and manage your inner chimp

(From "The Chimp Paradox" by Prof Steve Peters)

Meet your chimp...

- Jumps to an opinion
- Thinks in black and white
- Irrational
- Paranoid
- Catastrophic
- Emotive judgement

Does she sound familiar? Look out for times when you are being subjected to a chimp hi-jack. Give your chimp a chance to run amok, having a bit of a scream and thumping her chest then politely request that she returns to her crate so that the human can do the thinking.

Your human:

- Evidence-based
- Rational
- In context and with perspective
- Shades of grey and balanced judgement

It may be necessary to distract the chimp or give her something to keep her entertained so that your human can get on with the job of following the appropriate course of action – those actions that fit with your rational thinking. You may want to learn other methods for managing your new inner friend, in which case you could consider buying Prof Peters' book.