

Health

Moderate drinkers

Research suggests they appear to live longer and have lower incidence of heart disease than teetotalers

Make exercise your habit

A LARGE number of us have failed to catch the exercise bug, and the effects are showing up not only in our expanding girth but also in our health — and death — statistics.

Women particularly are sedentary. As Dr I-Min Lee of Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston has noted: "Physical inactivity increases the risk of developing many chronic diseases, including coronary heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. Such sedentary behavior is also associated with higher body weight, and obesity increases the risk of many of the same chronic diseases."

Why, in the face of so much propaganda, aren't more women moving in ways that can protect their mental and physical well-being?

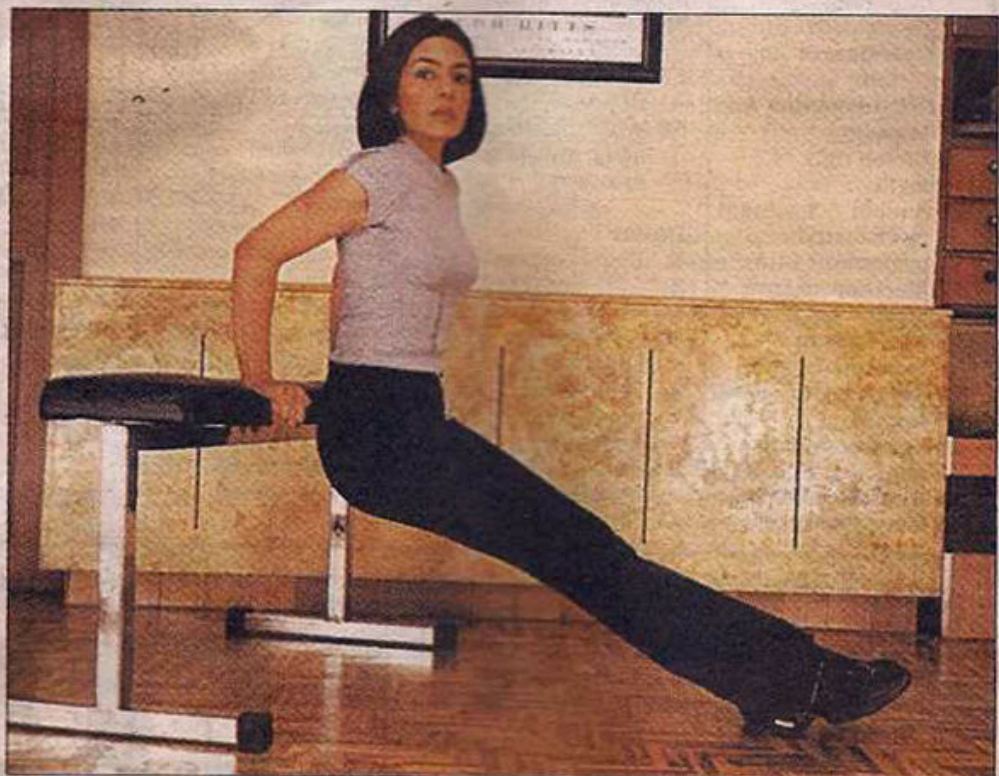
One reason may be that the early prescriptions for protective exercise — vigorous aerobic activity for at least 20 minutes, at least three times a week — did not suit sedentary people, who shun heavy sweating and breathlessness.

Another reason might be that the three-times-a-week approach failed to establish a routine that fitted into one's daily life.

Now all that has changed. In the last decade, dozens of studies have shown that exercise need not be vigorous to confer a significant health benefit.

Moderately vigorous activity for 30 minutes a day on most days reaps many of the rewards of regular activity.

Although for weight control an hour a day of moderate-intensity activity is preferable, even half that can reduce the risk of heart disease and strokes, diabetes, and cancers of the breast



Fitness expert Nawaz Modi Singhanian working out at her health spa
● FILE PIC

and colon.

Notice that I said regular. Physical activity should be programmed into daily life, just like eating, sleeping and brushing your teeth, so that you really miss it when circumstances force you to skip a day or two now and then.

One of the best ways to make exercise a daily habit is to find one or more activities that you enjoy and one or more companions who will participate in them with you.

Two studies published last week in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* may provide the motivation many women need to get moving and stay moving.

One study, directed by Dr

Anne McTiernan of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Centre in Seattle, examined the risk of breast cancer among 74,171 postmenopausal women enrolled in the Women's Health Initiative study.

Although a number of previous studies found that physically active women had a decreased risk for breast cancer, little was known about what kinds of activity and how much was needed to be protective.

The new study, which followed the women for an average of nearly five years, found that those who engaged in the equivalent of 75 to 180 minutes a week of brisk walking had 18 per cent less risk of developing breast

cancer than inactive women.

The risk continued to decline, but only slightly, for women who did up to 10 hours of brisk walking or its equivalent, although other studies have suggested that the degree of protection is directly related to the amount of activity.

Not only was current physical activity protective. Women in the study who had been physically active at ages 35 and 50 also experienced a reduced cancer risk, the authors noted.

Furthermore, those who were using postmenopausal hormones, which increase breast cancer risk, were less likely to get breast cancer if they were physically active.