

Health & Fitness

The "Holiday Layoff" and How It Affects the Human Body

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There are two things your body uses to live efficiently - constant monitoring and constant adaptation.

Every second of every day your body is analyzing what you are doing now, what you did yesterday, and what it thinks you are going to do tomorrow. With this information it decides on how to adapt. If you did nothing yesterday and nothing the day before the first thing your body asks is "is this an anomaly or is this a pattern?" If it is the former then it will do nothing or very little in terms of adaptation. If it asks that same question and realizes that it has asked the same thing many times in the last few weeks then it starts to shut things down and metabolize things it doesn't think it will need.

Where do you keep your ladder in your house? In the basement. When you need it, you go and get it, and once you're done you put it back, but if you think you may need the ladder tomorrow you will leave it out because it is too much work to put it back and then get it out again. At the same time when you do go to get it out, depending on how long it's been since you used the ladder, you may not remember exactly where it is and there will probably be many other things in the way making it harder to access.

Your body works in exactly the same fashion in terms of health and fitness. The first thing your body will do when you stop being active is decrease the ability of the brain to be able to communicate with the muscles (decrease nervous signalling) and that is why when people come back to the gym after a short layoff they are surprised at how fast things start to come back in terms of strength and recovery. They think they are getting stronger when really their body is just "turning on" their nervous connection to their muscles. Muscle tissue takes so much time and energy to produce that the last thing your body wants to do is break it down and then re-build it later.

Also when a person takes time from exercise their body will turn down its metabolic rate to save energy because it doesn't need as much as it did when the person was active.

This makes perfect sense and is very efficient but this is usually where fat storage increases because people's caloric intake does not necessarily decrease with a decrease in activity, unfortunately it is usually the opposite.

So now your body is using fewer calories but still has all these extra calories it has to deal with so the only thing it can do is store them as fat. What people don't realize is that your body doesn't want to do this because fat is something your body has to carry, and it doesn't want to carry extra weight because that is inefficient, but it has no choice at this point. Then there is also the catch 22, the more fat you carry, the more your body slows down your metabolism to decrease the amount of fat it is having to store but if the caloric intake is constant, it leads to even more fat storage and so on etc.

So what is the moral of the story?

1. Decrease the amount of calories you intake when you decrease your activity level.
2. Always maintain some type of physical regime no matter how sporadic and short it may be.

People think that "oh I can only go to the gym once per week so what's the point?" The point is you will be in much better health than if you take that one day out. As soon as your body realizes that it is not getting any exercise at all, things go downhill rapidly but you can maintain a good state of health by training very little if you are smart and consistent.

Get moving today!

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