

WHAT'S YOUR EXERCISE PERSONALITY?

'Why is one person always compelled to (exercise) while another person struggles constantly? Some people just thrive off it, while for others it's like pulling teeth'

BY KATHERINE DEDYNA
Times Colonist staff

Ryan Rhodes is an exercise expert who doesn't really like to exercise.

"I don't work out every day and I don't jog every day," says the 29-year-old UVic assistant professor. "It's only about three times a week. I'm not a mad exerciser and I struggle with those three times."

Why some people have exercise aversion has been his focus for years of study leading up to him becoming one of the only exercise psychology researchers in B.C.

His current research is related to personality traits such as extroversion versus introversion as they pertain to keeping fit — pertinent for both adults and children.

"Extroverts generally exercise more

• **Every bit helps when you're trying to shed pounds/ SEE PAGE C3**

and therefore are more physically fit," says Rhodes, who describes himself as more of an introvert.

How big a predictor is extroversion? "It's actually quite a big predictor. I have about six research studies now with different populations, everyone from young adults 18 years old to cancer survivors around the age of 80."

Extroversion predicts how people meet their stated exercise goals for a week. They exercise more regularly, do more exercise than they set out to do, enjoy the team aspect of exercise and they seem to like gym culture more, he says.

"One of the components of being an extrovert is really a need to be busy and

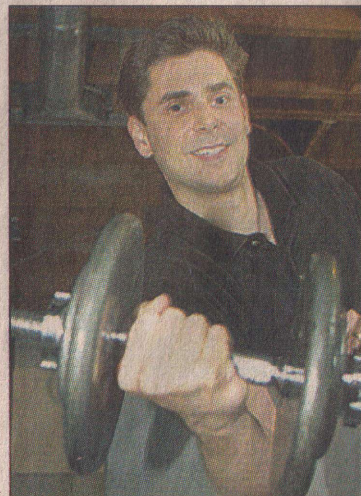
one of the ways to fulfill that may be physical activity. Introverts in general like to be in a less stimulating environment with only a couple of people and a more of controlled environment."

One of his research projects over the next few years is to look at a battery of personality influences and perceptions of control, attitude, cultural differences with a large random population sample from everybody from 13 years of age to 85.

And parents should be aware than their own personality type could influence the choice of their child. Canadian children are increasingly overweight and changing behaviour patterns gets harder with increasing age.

Meanwhile, the public gets much of its exercise advice from people who have no trouble at all motivating themselves.

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UVic exercise researcher Ryan Rhodes: Extroverts generally exercise more.

Ian McKain/Times Colonist

Exercise Personality: Enjoy it

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"We want to get into the minds of people who have almost no interest in this or who haven't given it a thought so that we can understand why they're not doing it."

Personality has not been given much profile in the exercise field. Much of the research surrounding exercise is about changing people's thinking about it because personalities can't be changed. Rhodes takes the opposite tack: "We might have to look at people's personalities and their general temperaments and change the environment so that it suits them, rather than putting someone in the same environment and just saying you have to think differently about it."

Rhodes joined the faculty last year, having earned his Ph.D. from the University of Alberta. Exercise psychology grew out of sports psychology, which is all about getting the athlete at peak performance, while the former just tries to get people active, period.

"It is harder than it sounds. We haven't been able to really change participation rates yet." In the 2000 survey by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 56 per cent of B.C. residents were found to be not active enough to get health benefits. And B.C. is the most active province.

For many people, there's not much leisurely about certain leisure activities.

"There's our biggest challenge — to make leisure activity a fun thing to do. And that's what we're trying to do, to find things that people wouldn't mind doing rather than telling them to do something that ultimately, they're not going to do.

"The question I say, is why is one person always compelled to do this while another person struggles constantly? Some people just thrive off it, while others it's like pulling teeth."

Enjoyment is critically important to keeping up with exercise, which in turn is critical to good health. "We have a well-established 50-per-cent dropout even among people trying to start an exercise regime."

Why do both extroverts and introverts give up?

"That is the million dollar question. . . . We work long hours and we have so many things to do in our lives. And a few of these things get lost in the shuffle these days and one of them is physical activity."

But mental fatigue is often confused with physical fatigue, and people don't realize the boost exercise will give their flagging energy after a long day sitting still at the office, he says.

There are other factors that get in the way of being active:

"They may believe they don't have the skills or abilities; they may feel they don't have the resources such as the money and the equipment and ultimately, I think the most important one is that they don't feel they have the opportunity.

"So at the end of the day if it's spending time with one's children or going out for a long walk, they might prefer to spend time with the children."

Do even the most proficient rockhard bodies really enjoy pumping iron?

"Good question. In fact one of my graduate students is going to look at the gym people you're talking about and quality of life and mental health."

Conventionally, more exercise has usually been associated with greater health. "But some of these people may be over-exercising and missing out on other points in life."

In general, exercise experts tend to downplay appearance benefits and underscore health benefits in the promotion of activity because they don't want to add to the unrealistic focus on looks already dominating so much of the culture.

But Rhodes believes young people are very much motivated by keeping up appearances. "I actually think it's one of the most important things."

Telling an 18-year-old to exercise to prevent heart disease at 70 is not what keeps them going.

"Knowledge of health benefits does not predict exercise. Ultimately, we're short sighted. We're more interested in fitting into our clothes and looking good day-to-day than even worrying about heart disease and that's an important thing to consider.

"People who are 65 who are starting to really face chronic diseases or who have faced them maybe they have very different belief systems. So we're trying to look at how all of these things tease out."

Where there's a will, there's a way



Everyday tasks add up to exercise

BY KATHERINE DEDYNA
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The remote control is broken. That means I have to haul off the couch and give the TV channel button 27 teeny pushes to move it from Knowledge Network to A & E. I hate it, but every little bit helps when it comes to keeping off the weight.

Epidemiologist Steven Blair, director of research at the Cooper Institute in Dallas, is a major proponent of seemingly inconsequential everyday movements that add up to major weight loss over a year.

For instance, walking into the gas station to pay burns only five calories more than using a credit card; washing and chopping fresh veggies burns only 12 calories more than opening a bag of pre-washed and climbing three flights of stairs just 15 more calories than a quick elevator ride. But 20 such ordinary activities done regularly over a year can result in an energy expenditure equal to 30 pounds a year, he recently told the Los Angeles *Times*.

Blair, who is president of the U.S. National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, blames modern-day obesity on this downward spiral of daily activity, even though fast food and super-size portions come in for a lot of attention.

In recent years, the Western way of life is cutting out routine activities at a hefty pace: clothes ironing; car washing; e-mails instead of walking to the corner mailbox or office. Just think of how many steps the convenient cordless phone has saved you.

Dr. Jody Wilkinson, a research physician with the Cooper Institute, suggests people are consuming only 100 more calories a day than we did 20 years ago, but could be burning off 500 fewer calories. Think of labour-saving devices and lifestyle changes ranging from garage door openers to leaf blowers, dishwashers, two-cars per family and hired help for housework.

UVic exercise psychology researcher Ryan Rhodes applauds Blair's stance in favour of everyday activities being key

SLOW BURN

Here's a look at the calories burned by daily activities as reported by Montana State University and the Detroit News

Calories per hour:

Sitting watching TV: 100

Standing: 140

Housework: 150 to 250

Heavy duty cleaning: 317

Strolling: 210

Raking Leaves: 225

Walking three miles per hour: 300

Golfing, pulling clubs: 352

Mowing lawn: 387

Scrubbing floor: 287

to a healthy body.

"It's trying to bring the bar right back down and start with the basics."

Exercise is just a small component of

physical activity, Rhodes stresses. But, physicality is increasingly relegated to an hour a day or week of exercise as opposed to movement integrated into the whole of life.

"That's very much true I think, and the problem is that if you miss that hour, now you've really missed your total physical activity. If you were to be more active throughout the day, just with those little simple things, you're expending calories throughout the day.

"Blair is actually the guru in that area and has been for years and has really been the major advocate of that approach of lifestyle over what we sometimes consider vigorous exercise. I think it's a good approach.

"I think it's good stepping stone to moving in the right direction."

Health Canada's recently released guidelines for activity are not excessive, he notes. They stipulate accumulating 30 minutes throughout the day at least four times a week with an exertion that causes a light sweat.