

Exercise counters negative effects of weight regain, researchers find

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Tom R. Thomas is a professor in the Department of Nutrition and Exercise Physiology at the University of Missouri. Credit: University of Missouri (MU)

With the obesity rate rising for American adults and children, health concerns such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease are a frequent reality. Although obesity itself is a major risk factor for disease, most of the threat may be associated with a cluster of risk factors called the metabolic syndrome (MetS). Losing weight can improve health and reduce these risk factors, but many people have difficulty keeping the weight off. Now, University of Missouri researchers have found that exercising during weight regain can maintain improvements in metabolic health and disease risk.

In the study, individuals who didn't exercise during [weight regain](#) experienced significant deterioration in metabolic health, while those who exercised maintained improvements in almost all areas. The MU study, led by Tom R. Thomas, professor in the Department of Nutrition and Exercise Physiology in the College of Human Environmental Sciences, is the first to examine the role of exercise in countering the negative effects of weight regain on MetS and overall health status.

"Although many people are successful at [losing weight](#) through diet and exercise, the majority of them will relapse and regain the weight," Thomas said. "The findings of this study indicate that regaining weight is very detrimental; however, exercise can counter those negative effects. The findings support the recommendation to continue exercising after weight loss, even if weight is regained."

In the study, overweight men and women with measured characteristics of MetS were given a diet and [aerobic exercise](#) plan that included supervised exercise five days a week, for 4-6 months. After losing weight, participants underwent programmed weight regain and were separated into two groups, one that exercised and one that didn't. The non-exercise group experienced rapid deterioration in weight-loss induced benefits to metabolic health. The exercise group maintained improvements in almost all measures, including LDL and HDL cholesterol, oxygen consumption (VO₂max), blood pressure and glucose. Exercise didn't maintain blood cholesterol and abdominal fat loss.

"It's clear that the message to lose weight isn't working because so many people regain weight; a new message is to keep exercising and maintain your weight to reduce disease risk and improve overall health," Thomas said. "Don't worry so much about losing weight, but focus on exercising and maintaining your current weight."

More information: The study, "Exercise and the Metabolic Syndrome

with Weight Regain," will be published in the Journal of Applied Physiology in April. To view the abstract, visit:
[jap.physiology.org/cgi/content ... bstract/01361.2009v1](http://jap.physiology.org/cgi/content...bstract/01361.2009v1)

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