



Government employees to undergo weekly physical exercise.

It should be personal and regulated

By Prof. Moses Muhumuza

In March 2024, the Head of Public Service and Secretary to cabinet in Uganda directed all government agencies to institute two hour weekly physical exercise. This directive was well intentioned to address a burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) among public servants.

Physical exercise is also a genetic requirement shaped by the evolutionary history of humans. The life style of our ancestors (in evolutionary context) was highly depended on physical exercise. As they lived a hunter-gather lifestyle hunting animals, running away from predators, climbing up and down hills and mountains, jumping and hopping in branches of trees, they exhibited physical exercise. This genetic code has persisted to present day humans evidenced in children who automatically engage in physical exercise in ways reminiscent of ancestral lifestyle.

But as adults due to the socio-cultural pressures of work and family we deviate from the ancestral physical exercise requirements and live a sedentary lifestyle where we spend most of the time seated in offices and vehicles and sleeping. Natural biological functions cannot be defied without detrimental consequences. That is the reason why NCDs and other diseases arise when we don't respond to the natural evolutionary and genetic call to do physical exercise.

However, despite the benefits of physical exercise, I write to caution on the nature and type of physical exercise that one should engage in. Physical exercise is not a "one size fit all" prescription. The process of exercising physically should be personalized and regulated. There are various incidents where people have hurt themselves as a result of unregulated physical exercise, others have developed health complications as a result of engaged in unprescribed physical exercise and others have lost life as a result of engaging in wrong physical exercise regimes.

Physical exercise should be scientific, undertaken following a particular procedure or with a prescription from an expert such as a physiotherapist. It is not just a matter of engaging in any physical exercise. Physical exercise is dependent on three factors:

1. Age.

2. Gender.
3. Health condition (emotional, mental and physical).

For example, a 59-year-old female commissioner in public service cannot have the same physical exercise regime as a 25-year-old male teacher in a certain secondary school. Also, a 35 year old male who has not been engaging in any physical exercise cannot have the same physical exercise regime as a 45 year old female that has for the last 10 years been engaging in regular physical exercise.

Physically exercise should not be haphazard but should be done targeting to attain or maintain certain physical fitness levels. There are 5 fitness levels that everyone should attain and maintain:

1. Aerobic fitness.
2. Muscular strength.
3. Body flexibility.
4. Reaction time.
5. Body Mass Index.

Each of these fitness levels have requisite physical exercises and their accompanying measurements which should be known to everyone that would like to engage in physical exercise. Also, the exercises for each of those fitness levels are based on gender, age and health condition of the individual. Such a criterion is in consonance with the biological behaviors of our ancestors. My advice is that each person should determine their level of physical fitness and get a menu of the appropriate physical exercises that he/she should undertake. To reiterate, physical exercise must be personalized and regulated.

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