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Activities of Daily Living and Exercise

By: James L. Holly, MD

Have you seen it? It's rather amazing. It is not only now politically correct, it is also commercially necessary. What is it? **Exercise!!!** McDonald's, that paradigm of "fast, fatty food" which contributes to people being "fat and sedentary," has "gotten the message." Their new Ad starts with a lady telling her dog to "go get the paper." The dog dashes through the pet entrance in the door and grabs the newspaper. He then takes it to the end of the drive. The master then walks out to the end of the drive and with a big smile picks up the newspaper and checks her pedometer – given to her in an adult "happy meal" at MacDonal'd's. The extra steps are part of the MacDonal'd's "health sensitive" initiative to sell salads and low fat, low calorie fare on its menu. The ad concludes with the command, "Go get the mail."

Americans are beginning to realize that all of our conveniences, which were intended to make us "enjoy life more," are in fact, squeezing the very breath of life out of us. The good news for Americans is there is a case study of how to correct this problem. There is a group of people whose life styles give insight into what has been lost by most Americans. It is the Amish.

The Amish and Activities of Daily Living

The Amish reject modern conveniences. They don't use telephones or computers and they don't use automobiles; they walk. And, how they walk! They don't "go to the track, or to the gym." They don't log their miles, or pace. They don't use heart rate monitors. They don't exercise as a discipline. But, boy, do they walk!

A study of Amish men and women was published in the journal *Medicine and Science and Exercise* in January, 2004. The result of a project at the University of Tennessee, the study documented that Amish men are six times more active than the average American. While the average American takes 2-3,000 steps a day; Amish men take an average of 18,425 steps a day and Amish women take an average of 14,196 steps a day. One Amish man took over 51,000 steps in a day, which is equivalent to walking 25 miles.

The study documented that in a week Amish men perform:

1. 10 hours of vigorous physical activity (tossing bales of hay, shoveling, digging and plowing)
2. 43 hours of moderate activity (gardening, feeding animals)
3. 12 hours of walking

Amish women weekly perform:

1. 3.5 hours of vigorous physical activity
2. 39 hours of moderate activity
3. 6 hours of walking

What is the result? The Amish have a 4% incidence of obesity and 26% were overweight as opposed to a 31% obesity and 64% overweight in the general American population. And, this is in spite of the very high-calorie, high-fat-content diet which the Amish typically consume.

The Amish finding falls in line with a theory espoused by University of Wisconsin professor William Morgan who stresses the need for “purposeful activity” in exercise. Mr. Morgan calls for a paradigm shift in physical activity, criticizing the current trend of “peddling treadmills to nowhere.” He says that when people exercise for a purpose, there is higher adherence to an exercise program. Purposeful activity includes mowing the lawn, cleaning the house, or even walking the dog. The Amish have that skill down pat. “The cows have to be milked,” says Mr. Morgan. “You can’t say, ‘It’s rainy. I’m going to skip today.’”

Activities of Daily Living and Exercise

Can something as simply as walking further to get the mail or the newspaper make a difference in your health? Absolutely! In another study published in the May, 2004 issue of *Medicine & Science and Exercise*, the official journal of the American College of Sports Medicine, it was reported that middle-aged women who took at least 10,000 steps per day on average were much more likely to fall into recommended ranges for measures of body composition such as total body weight and body fat percentage. Conversely, inactive women – those taking fewer than 6,000 steps per day – were more likely to be overweight or obese and have higher waist circumferences, a strong predictor of increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

"Our research clearly shows that middle-aged women who accumulate more daily steps have a more favorable body composition profile," said Dixie L. Thompson, Ph.D., FACSM, the study's lead author. "This is the first study to specifically examine the relationship between average accumulated steps per day and body composition variables in women who are in their middle years."

In the study, eighty women between the ages of 40 and 66 were first weighed and measured, then instructed to wear pedometers for one week and log the number of steps

taken each day. They were asked to follow their typical work and leisure routines during the one-week period. Researchers classified the participants into groups of:

1. Inactive (6,000 or fewer average daily steps),
2. Somewhat active (6,000 – 9,999) and
3. Active (10,000 or more)

They then analyzed body mass index (BMI), body fat, and waist and hip circumference. The study showed a significant inverse correlation between average steps and each of these measurements. On average, those in the active category had only 26 percent body fat and were within the recommended BMI range while those in the inactive group had a body fat percentage of 44 percent and fell well into the overweight category for BMI.

Researchers point out the public health implications of the evidence, particularly the apparent benefit of accumulating steps throughout the day. Although dietary intake is of equal importance, the investigators suggest that this evidence may eventually lead to the establishment of a standard volume of daily walking for middle-aged women that may help to prevent unhealthy weight gain.

Current physical activity guidelines from the ACSM and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention call for adults to accumulate 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on all or most days of the week. Walking is frequently recommended as a key strategy to help achieve that goal.

"Considering that middle-aged and older women are much more likely to choose walking as their leisure-time activity, the results of this study tell us that increases in walking and steps per day may be an effective strategy to help achieve proper weight and good health," said Thompson.

These "step" recommendations are not complicated by heart rate monitors or by stop watches or distance measurements. They are simply a means of documenting that you are "moving."

Active Living Partners Program

One major effort at helping people incorporate an active lifestyle into their future health plans is the Active Living Partners (ALP) program developed by Human Kinetics and The Cooper Institute. ALP's mission is to help sedentary adults adopt and maintain physically active lifestyles. The program is based on research showing that moderate physical activity improves health; the program also shows that people can be successful in becoming and staying physically active if taught appropriate lifestyle skills such as addressing and overcoming barriers to physical activity, setting realistic goals, and developing social support systems.

ALP pursues its mission by pursuing the two goals:

1. Create and disseminate a realistic, practical, and research-proven program that teaches people the skills they need to successfully adopt and maintain a physically active lifestyle.
2. Develop and support a network of outstanding health and fitness professionals to implement Active Living programs in their communities and maintain physically active lifestyles.

ALP's philosophy is based on three principles:

1. Moderate amounts and intensities of physical activity result in significant health benefits.
2. Lifestyle physical activity provides an important alternative for people who cannot fit traditional fitness center-based exercise into their daily lives.
3. People are more likely to become and stay physically active when taught appropriate lifestyle skills that are based on their individual readiness to change their behavior.

You can learn more about this program by contacting: **The Cooper Institute**, 12330 Preston Rd, Dallas, TX 75230. Phone: 972-341-3200. Email: courses@cooperinst.org
Web: <http://www.cooperinst.org>

Treatment of every disease known to man

The treatment for virtually every treatment known to man, including diabetes, heart disease, respiratory disease, cholesterol, etc., begins with activity. The reality is that the causes of all of these diseases can be traced directly or indirectly to sedentary life styles.

Do you recall the introduction to the February 26, 2004, Your Life Your Health column entitled, "The Consequences of being a couch potato?" No? Here it is:

Question: Which will do more for the improvement of your health? Visiting the doctor or visiting the gym?

Question: Which will do more for the improvement of your health? Taking a pill or taking a walk?

Question: What can medicines do to help you avoid the consequences of your inactive lifestyle? The answer: **nothing!**

Remember it is your life and it is your health. So, get a pedometer. Get moving!!