

James L. Holly, M.D.

Exercise for Life - Something is Better than Nothing **By: Scott Anthony, RN, MSN, CFNP and James L. Holly, MD**

It is my habit to walk five miles five days a week. Saturday morning as I walked, I noticed a group of ladies in a water-aerobics class. They were older and overweight. As I continued my walk, I realized that "exercise for health" is not a competitive sport. In order to benefit -- indeed, in order to win -- you don't have to "beat" someone else, or be "better" than someone else, you simply have to improve your own performance gradually and continue the process over a long time. This is not unlike Mikhail Baryshnikov's declaration, "I do not try to dance better than anyone else. I only try to dance better than myself."

As I continued to walk and to think about these ladies, I realized how smart they are. They want to live well, while they live, and they are doing something about it. That's smart! They don't have to do a great deal; they don't have to be competitors with others, they simply have to take responsibility for their own well being and determine to start and to continue exercise for the rest of their lives.

Support for Exercise

Exercising for health and for life -- this refers to exercising for the remainder of your life -- is critical to your health. The Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that physical inactivity contributes to up to 23 percent of all deaths from major chronic diseases. The psychological and physiological benefits of exercise and vigorous leisure are well documented. The key factor for good health is regular and frequent bouts of exercise. An example would be exercise sessions that last a minimum of 30 minutes, three times per week of cardiovascular exercise (stair-climbing, walking briskly, bike or rowing). Research has clearly demonstrated when people exercise regularly:

1. They live longer and feel better.
2. They notice better sleep patterns, and
3. They cope more effectively with stress while maintaining a higher level of stamina and energy as a direct result of exercises.

Studies have shown that people who are motivated properly assume more responsibility for their own health when they are engaged in an exercise program. A report that appeared in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1987 reported that a vigorous bout of exercise in the middle of the day improved mental alertness and productivity for 4-5 hours afterwards.

In 1996, the U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health stated that a sedentary lifestyle is a dangerous risk factor for disease. The good news is that even moderate levels of physical activity for people of all physical abilities will significantly reduce the risk of such chronic health problems as:

- Heart disease,
- Diabetes, and
- Some cancers.

Among other benefits to individuals of a moderate exercise program are:

- Weight reduction
- Reduced tension and feelings of stress
- Improved well-being
- Enhanced self-image and self-esteem
- Improved physical function

With just 30 minutes of moderate activity on five or more days a week, individuals can begin to enjoy the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. People don't have to jog or go to a gym to be more active. Simple, everyday activities such as walking, doing yard work and climbing the stairs contribute to a physically active lifestyle.

Principles of Exercise

1. Something is better than nothing.
2. Consistency and persistence are more important than how far or how fast you walk, run, jog, swim, row or bike.
3. It is better to start, even if you fail to persist, than it is to have never started. The day you start to exercise you place yourself into a "winner's circle," because the act of starting makes you a winner.
4. So, what if you don't persevere? Start over! What if you fail to persevere 100 times? Start over 100 times. There is no limit to how often you can start. And, it is smarter to "start, stop and start again," than it is to never start.
5. Commit to the long haul. Don't try to correct years of bad habits over night. Be prepared to "stay with it" for one year, two years, ten years -- for life!

6. Make sure you don't hurt yourself. Exercise within your capacity. Hurting yourself only limits your ability to benefit from a life-style of activity.
7. If possible, exercise with a friend who will encourage you to continue and who will provide accountability for you on the days you are tempted to neglect your exercise.

Don't ever forget, the human body was design to function best when it is mobile. A sedentary life style is not healthy. Activity is good for your bones, your heart, your bowels, you brain, your lungs, your kidneys, your skin -- your entire body!

Recommendations from SETMA Healthcare Provider, Mr. Scott Anthony, CFNP

Many health organizations such as the American College of Sports (ACSM) and the American Heart Association (AHA) have recommended physical activity to the public. These and other health organizations have recommended 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity on all, or most, days of the week. Examples of moderate-intensity exercises are golf, walking, tennis, dancing, swimming and gardening. Even intermittent activity throughout the day like taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking instead of driving short distances and calisthenics can benefit your health.

Major findings of decades of research regarding physical activity and health are:

- People who are usually inactive can improve their health and well-being by becoming even moderately active on a regular basis.
- Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits.
- Greater health benefits can be achieved by increasing the amount (duration, frequency, or intensity) of physical activity.

Regular physical activity that is performed on most days of the week reduces the risk of developing or dying from some of the leading causes of illness and death in the United States. Regular physical activity improves health in the following ways:

- Reduces the risk of dying prematurely.
- Reduces the risk of dying from heart disease.
- Reduces the risk of developing diabetes.
- Reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure.
- Helps reduce blood pressure in people who already have high blood pressure.
- Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer.

- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety.
- Helps control weight.
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints.
- Helps older adults become stronger and better able to move about without falling.
- Promotes psychological well-being.

The amount of benefit you receive from exercise depends upon the:

- Duration -- the time spent
- Intensity -- how hard you work during the time spent
- Frequency -- how often you perform the exercise

This means that with more time and less intensity, you can achieve the same essential benefit which someone else gets from run faster, but spending less time at the exercise. The same amount of health benefit can be obtained in longer sessions of moderately intense activities (such as brisk walking) as in shorter sessions of more strenuous activities (such as running).

Some less vigorous exercise which will require more time expenditure, but which will achieve your health-improvement goals are:

- Washing and waxing a car for 45-60 minutes
- Washing windows or floors for 45-60 minutes
- Playing volleyball for 45 minutes
- Playing touch football for 30-45 minutes
- Gardening for 30-45 minutes
- Wheeling self in wheelchair for 30-45 minutes
- Walking 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles in 35 minutes (20 min/mile)
- Basketball (shooting baskets) for 30 minutes
- Bicycling 5 miles in 30 minutes
- Pushing a stroller 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles in 30 minutes

- Raking leaves for 30 minutes
- Walking 2 miles in 30 minutes (15 min/mile)
- Water aerobics for 30 minutes
- Swimming laps for 20 minutes
- Wheelchair basketball for 20 minutes
- Basketball (playing a game) for 15-20 minutes
- Bicycling 4 miles in 15 minutes
- Jumping rope for 15 minutes
- Running 1 ½ miles in 15 minutes (10 min/mile)
- Stair walking for 15 minutes

While more vigorous activities can accomplish your health improvement goals in less time spent in exercise, such vigorous activities also increase the potential of injury. As we get older, sports injuries heal slower and therefore need to be avoided. If you are thinking about vigorous exercise, you should consider the following.

To avoid soreness and injury, individuals contemplating an increase in physical activity should start out slowly and gradually build up to the desired amount to give the body time to adjust. People with chronic health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, or obesity, or who are at high risk for these problems should first consult a healthcare provider before beginning a new program of physical activity. Also, men over the age of 40 and women over the age of 50 who plan to begin a new vigorous physical activity program should consult a healthcare provider first to be sure they do not have heart disease or other health problems.

America's Healthcare Crisis Results from Americans not caring about their health

The following facts about exercise in America will help you understand why part of the health care crisis in American really stems from a crisis of Americans caring enough about their health to do something about it. In reality, there is no pill or medical treatment which can do you health as much good as a moderate exercise program consistently practiced for life. Here are some startling facts:

1. More than 60% of adults do not achieve the recommended amount of regular physical activity.
2. 25% of all adults are not active at all.

3. Nearly half of young people aged 12-21 are not vigorously active on a regular basis.
4. In high school, enrollment in daily physical education classes dropped from 42% in 1991 to 25% in 1995.

Clearly, you can see the problems with poor health and obesity that are increasing in the population of the United States, which could be avoided with a regimen of regular exercise. You are never too old to enjoy the benefits of regular exercise. Parents can help their children maintain a physically active lifestyle by providing encouragement and opportunities for physical activity. People in today's society are accustomed to taking pills for a variety of health problems. Think of exercise as your "daily pill" to prevent illness and maintain good fitness.

Remember, it's your life and it's your health.