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**You can get there, but you have walk Part V
4 x 13 becomes 3 x 17.334 which become 2 x 26
by James L. Holly, MD
Your Life Your Health
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Part I of this series was published on September 24th. In that article, I discussed an ambitious goal of walking 5.5 miles a day for 365 days without missing a day. On the day this column is being prepared (October 20th), the 4 x 13 project has morphed into a 3 x 17.334 project. On September 20th, I completed 1/4th of the project. Today, I complete 1/3rd of my goal with 122 days of daily walking 5.5 miles. On December 20, 2009, I will reach the 2 x 26 project goal, which will be the halfway point in this exercise. This recitation illustrates itself how you accomplish a daunting goal of walking 365 days without missing a day; you do it one day at a time. By the way, on November 4th, I will be 66 years of age. On that day, I intend to walk 6.6 miles.

Lessons I have learned or remembered

Fitness Exercise is not a competitive sport

Having finished 1/3rd of this project, I have daily recalled the lessons I have known about exercise for cardiovascular and respiratory fitness. First, it is not a competitive sport. I walk on a ½ mile track which means that I go round and round. On that same track there are people who run and the majority of runners, run faster than I walk, but let me add, not all of the runners, run faster than I walk. Every time I am passed by a runner, I am reminded that I am not doing this to “beat” someone else. This is not a zero-sum game – there is not a winner and a loser. The only losers in the game of exercise fitness are those who do not participate.

There is one regular runner on the track where I exercise who runs twice as fast as I walk. This means that for every time I circle the track once; he does it twice. There was a time when I ran almost as fast as he does, but I cannot compete with him now. Due to injury and age, if competition with him is the standard of achievement, I will always be a loser. Fortunately, it is not.

Monday, as I walked my 5.5 miles, I expected to walk a little slower but felt really good and found myself walking my “fast pace” and I passed all of the walkers on the track, some several times. I passed two ladies who shouted, “Maybe we better pick up our pace.” I shouted back – we were only shouting because of how rapidly we were moving away from each other – “Exercise for fitness is not a competitive sport.”

The real winners are those who participate

Last week, as I walked, I saw a lady on the track with a four-pronged cane walking. She was moving her right leg in the classic post-stroke fashion where she was partially swinging the leg due to paralysis of certain groups of muscles. When I approached her and came along side her, I

stopped and said, “I have watched you in the gym and I want to say again how proud I am of you and how wonderful it is that you are here working so hard.” As I walked away from her, there was no question in my mind who the winner is if we competed with one another. She is the winner; hands down.

Success means that you make choices

Occasionally, my knowledge is overcome by my nature. One Saturday morning, I passed a physician friend who was walking. I shouted, “I’m going to catch that guy up there” – pointing to a jogger about 150 yards ahead of us. I had been “chasing” him for a while and was catching up with him. Remember, I can’t run because of a severe injury to my right knee. After running a few hundred yards it swells and hurts for days, but I can walk. I can push and pull; I just can’t pound.

Using every technique I knew to concentrate and maximize my forward motion while maintaining a “heel strike toe” motion which qualifies what I am doing as “walking” I pursued my quarry. I was almost up to him. With only about 25 yards to go, my breathing was fine. My legs felt great. I was going to catch him. Then my right knee began to hurt. I could have caught him but then I would have jeopardized my goal. The swelling could have gotten so bad that I would have had to take a few days off, so I slowed down and the pain went away. Quickly, the runner pulled away from me and as he did, I was thankful I could walk.

Finishing requires that you start

It is possible to fail at a goal and the more ambitious the goal, the more possible, if not probable, is the potential for failure. I may not succeed at walking 5.5 miles a day for 365 days, but I know for sure that I cannot fail at doing it for 122 days. The key for me is starting. Whether it is the daily exercise, or the long-term goal, beginning is the key to finishing. There are two maxims which I have lived by:

1. I would rather fail 1,000 times trying than succeed once doing nothing.
2. I have started many things which I did not finish, but I have never finished anything that I did not start.

Simple concepts if not simplistic, but they are true. I finish my 5.5 mile walk every day when I start. The only risk of not finishing is not to start. Always remember, the famous quote from President Theodore Roosevelt; he said:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually try to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails,

at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

Listen to your body

By nature, as much as I know that it is not the key, I compete. Mostly now, I compete with myself because I can't beat many others. I compete against time, against distance, against endurance, against... But, what I must do is to listen to my body. There are days, when I can blaze – well for me it's blazing – around the track at 11 minutes 45 second miles. Other days, I have to slow down because my legs are flat, or I don't feel well, or I am tired. Whatever the reason, the key is to do it; the icing on the cake for me is doing it “fast.”

When I started this exercise on June 20, 2009, I knew that I had to slow down if I were to do this every day and I did. Gradually, as my legs and aerobic capacity improved – eventually to where it is as good as before I caught West Nile virus – I was able to begin to do my usual speed almost every day. I still must listen to my body and be willing to slow down in order to be able to keep on.

Consistency in Fitness Exercise is more mental than it is physical

A long-term fitness goal requires more mental discipline than it requires physical ability. Consistency requires that you have a mental toughness. The willingness to walk in the cold, or with the potential of getting wet, or at odd hours to fit your schedule are all elements of this toughness. There are always very good excuses for not exercising. And, they are legitimate excuses, but they can be overcome. It is fun to walk in pleasant weather. Sunshine and warmth are pleasant circumstances, but in the heat of August it is tough to walk. And, depending upon your age or condition, it can be dangerous. You have to listen to your body. Walking in the cold is not fun.

Walking in the dark is not fun.

One Saturday, in August, I wanted to go see my mother. She lives in Natchitoches, Louisiana. I could only spend the day and it's almost a three-hour drive. I knew that I would not have time while there to walk so I had to do it before I left to see my mother. I enjoy driving to Natchitoches through the woods early in the morning. To do that, I had to walk early. So at 3:00 AM, I hit the road, literally. As I finished my walk around the track, I started my walk home.

When I got to 11th and Harrison, there were cars sitting at the red light. What in the world were these people doing up at 4:00 AM on a Saturday morning. I laughed as I imagined what they were thinking about me being out that hour of Saturday for a walk. My laughter turned to alarm as I stepped into 11th Street because I had the light. I was looking at the light to make sure it was red and I missed my step. The next thing I knew I was face down on the pavement. I had tripped. I quickly gathered my cell phone – my wife required me to carry it in case I was assaulted, little knowing my greatest danger came from myself – and my glasses. I checked to make sure nothing was broken and looked again to make sure the light was still red; I stood up,

waved at the cars and continued my walk. That's what I call really "hitting the road." I still wonder what those people were thinking.

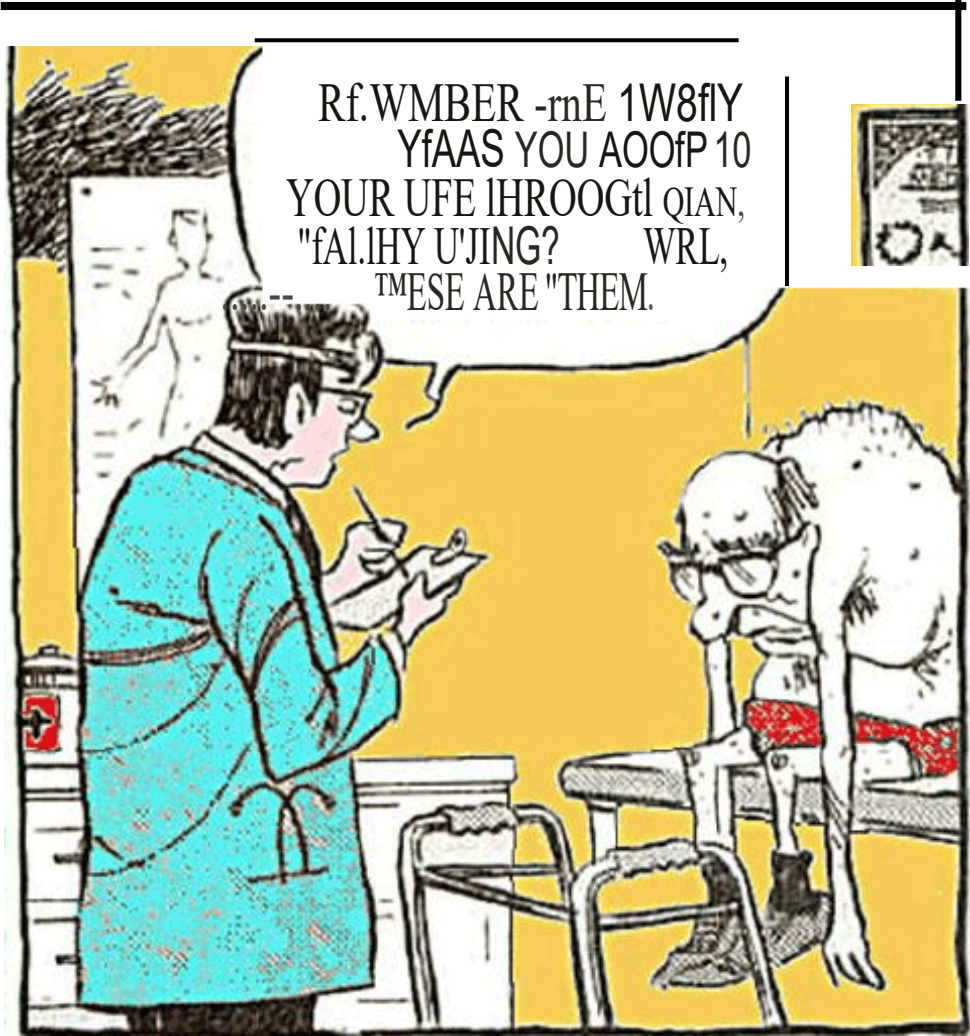
The mental discipline required to maintain an exercise program will be different from person to person. For guys it often is a matter of keeping track of how far, how fast, how often you exercise. For ladies, the mental discipline is sometimes different. Whatever it takes, use the tools which you have to "keep going," even if you "fall," I mean "fail;." just pick yourself up and keep going.

Laziness – Undisciplined

There is probably only one person on earth who knows this – I may be surprised if I took a poll – but I think only my wife knows that I am by character a lazy person. Many of our favorite experiences which define our 45-year relationship are based on stories which illustrate this fact. No, I'm not going to tell them here.

Where my laziness is seen is in the fact that I do those things which I want to do, or that I like to do, rather than the things which I need to do. Fitness is a perfect example. Cross training is a concept with which I am familiar and I recommend it to you and to my patients. Mixing up your exercise – weights, aerobics, stretching – that's the way to success, but I am bored with weights and stretching so I don't do much of those. I would be better off if I did, and so will you, but then I'm lazy and you're not. My laziness is no excuse; just a fact.

Remember, we exercise in order to improve our quality of life, but you still must keep a sense of humor about it all. If you need motivation for exercising for your health, try this!!!



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