

## Exercise Helps You Live Longer

Numerous studies have shown that exercise can protect against disease and early death. Jonathan Myers, PhD, a clinical assistant professor of medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine in Palo Alto, California, points out recent research findings that support this view:

- 1. The U.S. Government Recommends 30 Minutes of Exercise Daily.** How much exercise helps you live longer? The Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health recommends that adults engage in at least 30 minutes of activity—walking, cycling, yard work, swimming or the like—on most, preferably all, days of the week.
- 2. Moderate Exercise Can Be Enough.** The government recommendations may seem modest. However, a study headed by Steven Blair, PED, senior scientific editor of the Surgeon General's report, found that survival gains achieved by going from sedentary to moderately active were greater than those achieved by going from moderately active to very active.
- 3. Walking Two Miles per Day Can Prolong Life.** As part of the Honolulu Heart Program, researchers studied the benefits of walking at least two miles per day (enough to meet the Surgeon General's recommendations) versus walking under a mile per day. The subjects were retired men. During the 12-year follow-up, the mortality rate for those who walked less than a mile daily was *nearly twice* as high as it was for those who walked more than two miles per day.
- 4. Exercise Lowers Women's Risk of Heart Attack.** In the Nurses' Health Study, researchers found that the age-adjusted risk of suffering a coronary event was 54 percent lower for the most active women than it was for the sedentary women. Even slightly active women had a 23 percent lower risk than the sedentary group.
- 5. Frequent Walking Helps.** In the same Nurses' Health Study, women who walked at a brisk pace for three or more hours per week significantly reduced their risk of having a heart attack. In fact, walking this much was just about as beneficial as regular vigorous exercise.
- 6. Obese People Who Stay Fit Live Longer.** For the Aerobics Center Longitudinal Study in Dallas, researchers followed more than 25,000 adults for an average of 13 years. The investigators found that obese subjects who were fit were

not at a significantly higher risk of early death than their fit, normal-weight counterparts. However, the risk increased more than threefold for unfit, obese subjects.

- 7. Leisure Time Exercise Yields Benefits.** During a 14 1/2-year study, researchers from Copenhagen, Denmark, found that the mortality rate of the most physically active subjects was approximately *half* that of the least active subjects. This trend was consistent, regardless of gender or age.
- 8. It's No Good Relying on the Past.** In the Framingham Heart Study, researchers found that *recent* exercise provides more health benefits than exercise performed long ago. So someone who has been sedentary for 40 years cannot rely on an athletic career in college for protection against heart attack. On the positive side, it is never too late to start an exercise program.
- 9. A Long-Term Program Is Key for Heart Attack Survivors.** In a follow-up to the National Exercise and Heart Disease Project, researchers compared men who had suffered heart attacks 19 years earlier. Some had participated in a cardiac rehabilitation exercise program; others had not. At the three-year follow-up, the exercisers had a 31 percent lower death rate than the nonexercisers. However, after 10 years, there appeared to be no benefit to the exercise. It was clearly important to continue exercising, as the protective mechanisms associated with the rehab program were short-term in nature.
- 10. Physical Activity Extends Life for Men With Diabetes.** In more research from the Aerobics Center Longitudinal Study, researchers studied men with type 2 diabetes. During the follow-up years, all-cause mortality was more than twice as high for men with a low fitness level as it was for fit men.

*This handout is a service of IDEA, the leading international membership association in the health and fitness industry.*

