

Exercise Helps Fight Aging

Regular exercise, even initiated late in life, can help fight the effects of aging. Healthy older individuals can substantially increase both strength and endurance with exercise. Some of the physical declines associated with aging, including a gradual decrease in the number of muscle fibers, are thought to be genetic in origin and irreversible. However, others -- including reductions in muscle fiber size due to inactivity -- are reversible through exercise.

The Texas team examined the results of dozens of studies assessing the benefits of exercise in elderly populations. Among their findings:

-- one 1989 study involving individuals in their 70s found that those who exercised regularly regained an average 22% of lost lung capacity within a 6-month span. This achievement effectively restored the exercisers' daily lung function to levels experienced in their 50s.

-- in a 1994 trial, subjects 75 years of age or older increased muscle strength up to 21% after 3 months of resistance training. The Texas authors believe this increase is linked to re-expansion in the size of existing muscle fiber.

-- in a study published last year, 40 elderly women used weighted vests during exercise to improve balance, strength and power. The result? All three factors improved "significantly," according to the Galveston authors.

They conclude that even frail patients of very advanced age can improve muscle strength.

Exercise has even wider benefits to health. Studies repeatedly show that regular, moderate-to-vigorous exercise can help prevent or delay the onset of hypertension, obesity, heart disease, osteoporosis, and the falls that lead to hip fracture. In fact, the authors point to the results of one 1995 study, which found that "(elderly) women who spent less than 4 hours per day on their feet had nearly double the risk" for hip fracture compared with exercising women.

A lifetime of regular aerobic and resistance exercise "is the ideal." However, the initiation of exercise in adulthood is also beneficial. And they note that although vigorous exercise may provide more cardiovascular benefits, moderate physical activity is nearly as beneficial and conveys less risk of injury. In other words, any form of exercise -- even in advanced age -- can serve as primary prevention to maintain good physical health.

Dr. Mercola's Comment:

A good reminder to get out there and start walking or jogging in the warmer weather that most of us are starting to get now. I have been exercising vigorously for the last thirty years and can personally testify that it is one of the best health activities one can do.

However, if one must choose between exercising and eating well due to one's schedule, I would advise to pursue the diet choices as they are generally much more beneficial to health than exercise.

Actually, the converse may be more true. The effects of a bad diet are not compensated for by exercise and may actually be worsened as exercise places certain demands on the body for detoxification. And if one does not have those nutrients to perform detox, certain cancers can develop and/or the aging process can actually be accelerated.

Source: Mercola.com