

ZEST E-NEWSLETTER
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WALKING & MEMORY

Walking improves memory - world-first trial

The 'Fitness for the Ageing Brain Study', conducted recently at the University of Western Australia, is believed to be the first in the world to demonstrate that moderate exercise can positively affect cognitive function.

Professor Lautenschlager, study leader and Chair of Old Age Psychiatry at the University of Melbourne says, "We found the improvement in memory occurred not only during the six month trial but also 6 and 12 months afterwards".

"We have known for a long time that exercise is a great way to improve cardiovascular health, but it may be that in the future, exercise can also be recommended to protect against the ageing brain."

The trial divided 170 people, aged 50 years and over, into two groups. One group continued their usual activities; the other took part in a 24-week home-based physical activity program with the aim of walking three 50 minute sessions or other moderate exercise each week.

Participants in the exercise group did an average of 142 more minutes in a week, or 20 minutes in a day, than those in the control group.

Professor Lautenschlager reported that participants in the exercise group performed better on cognitive tests and had better delayed recall. They also had lower Clinical Dementia Rating Scores.

"Unlike medication, which was found to have no significant effect on mild cognitive impairment, physical activity has the advantage of other health benefits such as preventing depression, quality of life, falls, cardiovascular function and disability," she says.

Source: *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 3 Sept. 2008

EXERCISE & STROKE

Exercising on a treadmill improves mobility and physical conditioning in stroke survivors

A new study suggests that exercise helps stroke survivors by rewriting parts of the brain, even years after the stroke occurred. The study involved 71 people who had suffered a stroke an average four years earlier.

At the start of the study, half of the subjects could walk without assistance, while the rest used a cane, a walker or a wheelchair.

The subjects, average age 63, were divided into two groups: 37 people walked on a treadmill three times a week, 34 people were given traditional stretching exercises.

Within six months the treadmill walkers improved their walking speed by 51% compared to 11% for the stretching group and scans detected increased brain activity in areas associated with controlling gait and walking.

Dr Daniel Hanley, a neurology professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine who helped lead the study, says some of the participants were wheelchair bound when they started, and many were using canes and walkers. After exercising on the treadmill some were able to give up or lessen their dependence on the devices.

The patients with the most improvement in walking showed the strongest change in brain activity, though the researchers say it is unclear whether these brain changes were caused by more walking or whether participants walked better because of increased brain activity. This will be the focus of a future study.

The researchers say treadmill work should be part of standard treatment for every stroke survivor who has a walking habit.

Dr Hanley says stroke patients are usually told to "learn to live with" their disabilities, unlike heart attack patients and others who are often prescribed lifestyle changes and exercise programs to help recover function.

Most stroke rehabilitation programs focus on short-term improvement, ending just a few months after a patient has had a stroke and as a result over the following years, patients' functional improvement plateaus and their fitness often wanes, which could increase the chance of a second stroke.

Dr Hanley says the results are great news for stroke survivors because it clearly demonstrates that long-term stroke damage is not immutable and it is never too late to recover.

Source: News-Medical Net www.news-medical.net/?id=41090

Journal Source: *Stroke*: Journal of the American Heart Association

BODY WEIGHT - MEN

Thin, middle-aged men more vulnerable to osteoporosis, bone fractures than other older men

Men who have low weight in middle age and reduce their weight, increase the chance of osteoporosis and fracture, according to a recent study in Oslo, Norway.

Low weight among middle-aged men was related to the risk of osteoporosis three decades later, and this risk was significantly affected by weight changes. Weight increase reduced the risk, whereas weight loss increased the risk, said lead author Haakon E. Meyer.

For the study 1,476 men who participated in the Oslo survey from 1972 to 1973 and the Tromsø survey from 1974 to 1975 were again studied for, among other things, osteoporosis in the Health Studies in Oslo 2000 to 2001 and Tromsø 2001.

This survey showed that low weight among middle-aged men, and subsequent weight loss, led to increased risk of osteoporosis when the men become older. Almost one-third had osteoporosis among the thinnest quarter of men in the 1970s that later lost weight. In contrast, of the quarter that had the highest weight in the 1970s and had not changed their weight, none of the men had osteoporosis.

Although weight increase and a high weight are beneficial for the skeleton, a stable,

healthy weight is still recommended, according to Dr Meyer. With respect to weight loss, however, the impact on osteoporosis and fracture should be taken into account and, if possible, prevented, he said.

Source: Norwegian Institute of Public Health
Journal Source: *American Journal of Epidemiology*

LIVING LONGER

Healthy lifestyle halves risk of premature death

Over half of deaths in women from chronic diseases such as cancer and heart disease could be avoided if they never smoke, keep their weight in check, take exercise and eat a healthy diet low in red meat and trans-fats, according to a study published on bmj.com.

A team of researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health and Brigham and Women's Hospital, recruited nearly 80,000 women aged 34-59 years in 1980, and followed them up over a 24-year period.

Over the follow-up period the authors documented 8,882 deaths including 1,790 from heart disease and 4,527 from cancer.

The authors estimated that 28% of these deaths could have been avoided if women had never smoked and that 55% could have been avoided if women had combined never smoking, regular physical activity, a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight. Alcohol intake did not substantially change this estimate, although heavy alcohol consumption is linked to an increased risk of dying from cancer.

Smoking was found to be the biggest cause of premature death but all the other factors also contributed.

Interestingly, women with light-to-moderate alcohol consumption (up to one drink a day) were less likely to die from cardiovascular diseases than alcohol abstainers.

The authors believe the results of this research indicate that more needs to be done to eradicate smoking and to encourage individuals to take regular exercise and eat healthily.

They conclude that "even modest differences in lifestyle can have a substantial impact on reducing mortality rates".

Source: *British Medical Journal*

MOTIVATION

Overcoming barriers to regular exercise

Finding excuses to NOT exercise is easy. The September issue of *Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource* offers ways to overcome common barriers with some creativity, flexibility and a different mindset. Here's a sample:

Excuse: I don't have time to exercise

Schedule exercise in your day as you would an appointment. If you wait to find time, it probably won't happen.

Turn off the TV. Free up time by watching one less program.

Think activity rather than exercise. Mow the lawn; climb the stairs; park farther from your destination.

Excuse: I'm too old

It is never too late to start. Even moderate physical activity, such as walking or raking leaves, can help prevent or delay age-associated conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Excuse: I'm too tired to exercise

Realize that exercising increases energy. You may be tired because you are not exercising, or not getting enough sleep. Go to bed earlier.

Be prepared. Have workout clothes ready on top of the dresser. Keep a bottle of water in the refrigerator. Simple shortcuts may make it easier to see plans through.

Make lunchtime count. Keep a pair of walking shoes at your desk and take a brisk walk during your lunch break.

Excuse: I'm self-conscious about how I look when I exercise

Others probably feel the same way. Remind yourself what a great favor you are doing for your health.

Go solo at first. As you become healthier and more at ease, you may feel confident enough to exercise with others.

Excuse: I'm not overweight, so I don't need to exercise

Being thin doesn't necessarily mean you're fit. Although a healthy weight is important, it is also important to get regular exercise.

Excuse: I can't exercise because I have a chronic health condition

This is valid only if your doctor has told you not to exercise. Physical exercise can help manage symptoms of many chronic conditions.

Source: www.mayoclinic.com