

## Exercise reduces heart disease risk

February, which is recognized as National Heart Month, is a good time to reduce your risk of heart disease by becoming more physically active, said Diane DeMarco, executive director of Minneapolis-based National Exercise For Life Institute. Exercise directly or indirectly influences several of the primary risk factors of heart disease, including: high levels of blood lipids (cholesterol and triglycerides), high blood pressure, and cigarette smoking.

The greatest single cause of death in the United States is cardiovascular disease (heart attacks, strokes, and other vessel diseases). Deaths from cardiovascular disease alone equal the combined total of all other causes of death, according to the American Heart Association.

Studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between lifestyle and cardiovascular health. When we're in our 20's, the relationship between exercise and weight control, and our overall lifestyle, including diet, may not seem very important. But, as we get older, health habits catch up with us, and it becomes more important to take control over the health factors we can influence.

"You can't control some of the risk factors for heart disease, such as family history, age, race and sex, but you can control many of the health habits related to heart disease, such as smoking, high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol," according to Jeff Zwiefel, M.S., exercise physiologist for The National Exercise For Life Institute.

### WHAT IS HEART DISEASE?

Heart disease is not just a single kind of illness, but a general name for more than 20 different diseases of the heart and its vessels. Arteriosclerosis is a generic term that includes practically any arterial disease that leads to thickening and hardening of arteries.

Atherosclerosis, on the other hand, is a specific and common form of arteriosclerosis. Atherosclerosis is caused by deposits of fat and other material on the inside of the arteries. These fatty deposits stick to the inner wall and make the artery thick and hard. It's dangerous because it cuts down the blood flow by narrowing the path of the artery wall. When the heart muscle doesn't get enough blood (oxygen and nutrients) it begins to die.

No one really knows what causes atherosclerosis, but it's clear that several factors increase its progress. Among these are smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

### EXERCISE LESSENS THE RISKS

In a recent study of 16,936 Harvard graduates, Dr. Ralph Paffenberger and his associates concluded that major health benefits can come from burning off only 2,000 calories per week by exercise. This study concluded that those more active people are less likely to die from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and perhaps from cancer.

There is also mounting evidence that regular aerobic activity can help people cut down or quit smoking, and lower their blood pressure and overall cholesterol. In addition, exercise helps to control obesity, diabetes and stress.

A recent research study entitled The Association Between Coronary Heart Disease Risk Factors and Physical Fitness in Healthy Adult Women published in *Circulation*, have also demonstrated that physical fitness has a positive impact on the risks of developing heart disease.

### HELPS HEART FUNCTION

Regular aerobic exercise helps the heart increase its functional capacity, while decreasing its oxygen demand. Aerobic exercise includes cross-country skiing, swimming, cycling, jogging, and walking. All of which use large

muscle groups, are rhythmical, continuous and elevate your heart rate to 60 to 80 per cent of its maximum capacity, explained Zwiefel.

### EXERCISE HELPS STABILIZE OR REVERSE ATHEROSCLEROSIS

New data demonstrates that exercise can prevent, interrupt, and possibly even reverse the atherosclerosis process. When exercise is combined with proper diet and no smoking, there is a significant reduction in death rates. Improving the hearts ability to deliver oxygen to the working muscles also makes it possible for people to live longer or have fewer heart attacks.

In-home exercise equipment such as the NordicTrack cross-country machine, is considered an excellent way of getting the regular aerobic exercise you need to improve your fitness level and reduce the risks of heart disease. NordicTrack has also recently introduced the NordicRow TBX, which simulates the motion of rowing. Split resistance settings allow people to choose separate resistance levels for both the upper and lower body, and an adjustable seat track incline enables users to vary the difficulty of their workouts.



## Work That Body aerobathon

One of Halton Hills' largest fundraisers for the Heart and Stroke Foundation is 'Dance for Heart' put on by Lori Burns of Work That Body in Georgetown. This year, over 150 people took part in

the aerobathon last Wednesday and were led by (front row, left to right) Donna Lanthier, Lori Burns and Suzanne DiMecheller to the theme of black and white. (Herald photo)

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