

A balanced fitness program helps fight disease

A balanced fitness program that includes strength training may be vital in helping to control or prevent osteoporosis, according to The National Exercise For Life Institute. Osteoporosis, a disease that results from loss of bone, affects one in three women over the age of 70. "After the age of 35, bone mass is lost at a rate of 10 per cent per decade," according to Diane DeMarco, executive director of the Institute. Women and elderly people have the highest risk of developing "porous bones," which means bones become less dense and are more likely to fracture.

Three major factors are responsible for a higher incidence of osteoporosis in postmenopausal women, according to Chiropractic Sports Medicine, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1987: reduced estrogen production; lower peak bone mass compared with men of similar age; and calcium intakes too low to support positive

calcium balance. Other factors that have been recently identified include a reduced vitamin D production in elderly people and an inactive lifestyle.

According to Exercise, Fitness and Health, 1988, mechanical force, through gravity and pull of muscles, is the only factor known to increase bone mass and strength. "Exercise may be the most effective way to prevent age-related osteoporosis," said DeMarco.

"People tend to become less and less active as they age, and that may be the cause, or at least a major contributing factor, in the development of osteoporosis," said Jeff Zwiefel, M.S., exercise physiologist for The National Exercise For Life Institute.

"Physical fitness activities that include strength training can be vital in preserving bone strength," said Zwiefel. Strength

training or resistance exercises increase the bone mass that structurally provides greater bone strength. Resistance exercise increases muscle strength and postural stability, and thus reduces the risks of bone and joint injuries associated with muscle fatigue.

Women should begin a strength training program prior to menopause. However, they can benefit from strength training even after a complete hysterectomy, according to The Strength Connection, How to Build Strength and Improve the Quality of Your Life, a book by the Institute for Aerobics Research in Dallas, Texas.

Strength training has numerous benefits: it improves muscle tone and balance, thus increasing mobility, and it reduces pain and depression. The results of various studies show that increased forces on the bone may increase bone mass.

Even though people are aware that they need a balanced fitness program that includes strength

training, they may feel ill-at-ease with traditional weight training systems such as free weights, or large, complex, weight machines. In addition, finding the time to fit strength training into busy schedules may be a dilemma. New in-home exercise devices such as NordicTrack's attractive, easy-to-use NordicFitness Chair and NordicPower are two solutions to those problems.

According to a study in Exercise, Fitness and Health, 1988, 20 subjects whose training regimen incorporated 20 minutes of aerobic movement and 20 minutes of strength training per session had a significantly higher calcium content after 12.5 months than did 18 subjects who did little or no strength training.

With just six basic exercises on the NordicFitness Chair, people can maintain and build muscle strength, tone and flexibility. The exercises take just 10 to 20 minutes, and should be done three times per week. The NordicPower, also used three times

per week, can be used to build a bigger, stronger body, or to tone, firm and shape your muscles.

The National Exercise For Life Institute advises that you consult with proper medical professionals knowledgeable about your condition before starting any exercise program. Your physician may also make some suggestions concerning calcium or other supplementation in your diet.

The purpose of The National Exercise for Life Institute is to collect and disseminate information on the benefits of regular exercise, in order to convince more Americans to start and maintain a personal exercise program.

For more information on the benefits of regular exercise and strength training, or information on ordering The Strength Connection, How to Build Strength and Improve The Quality of Your Life, or The New Fitness Formula of the 90's, call The National Exercise For Life Institute, 612-448-3094 or write Box 2000, Excelsior, MN 55331-9967.

Hypertension a killer

Hypertension is a raised blood pressure. It is one of the most common causes of hospital admission in this country and is a major factor in both coronary heart disease, strokes and other cerebro-vascular diseases.

Blood pressure is normally expressed as two figures.

1. Systolic blood pressure is the higher value and represents the maximum pressure in the arterial system when the heart contracts.
2. Diastolic blood pressure is the lower value and represents the minimum pressure in the arteries. It indicates the general condition and resistance of the arterial system.

Blood pressure must depend on, first, the force of contraction on the heart; secondly, the resistance of the blood vessels; and, thirdly, the volume of blood within the system.

The capacity of the heart stays fairly constant, as does the blood volume of the blood. It is the resistance of the blood vessels which is the most important factor in influencing the level of blood pressure.

By having routine medical checks, an early diagnosis will be of most benefit to an individual with hypertension.

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