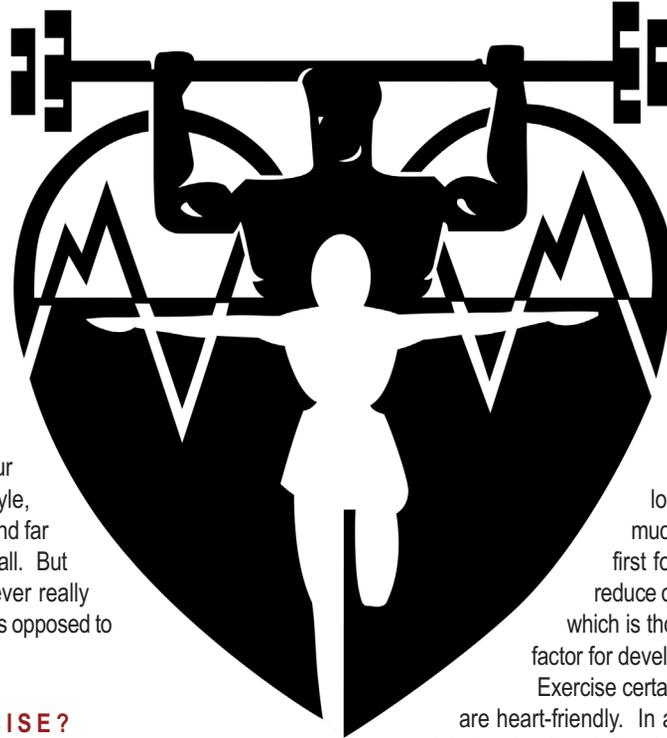




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DOES EXERCISE PREVENT HEART DISEASE?



We all know that in some way, exercise is good for your heart. But did you know the converse is also true? Lack of exercise actually increases your risk of heart problems. Still, knowing and doing are two separate things. Unfortunately, in our fast-food/car-culture lifestyle, most Texans are sedentary and far too many do not exercise at all. But even for those who have never really exercised, doing something as opposed to nothing is always beneficial.

HOW MUCH EXERCISE?

Surprisingly, you do not have to engage in the most intense or lengthy exercise routine to have a positive effect on your cardiac risk. But how much exercise is enough to help prevent heart disease?

Certainly, there is general agreement that vigorous activity seems to reduce heart risk. One Harvard study found that vigorous workouts reduced the risk of coronary heart disease by 20 percent. Frequent, vigorous exercise such as jogging, swimming, and aerobics was quite beneficial in all patients, even in people with multiple cardiac risk factors such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

But other studies have suggested that even light to moderate activity can help reduce your risk. One study of 44,000 men suggested that those who walked for about 30 minutes per day (12 miles/week) enjoyed a 20 percent decrease in their risk of developing heart disease. As you might expect, the greater the effort, the more the risk reduction – patients who ran, rowed, or did weight training for more than one hour per week had additional benefits yielding up to a 40 percent reduction in risk.

The same is true for women. The Nurse's health study of 72,000 women found that the more physically active the patients were, the lower their risk of having a heart attack. Another study of 40,000 women found that simply walking one to two hours per week reduced the risk of heart disease by 50 percent!

OTHER BENEFITS

Even low levels of exercise on a daily basis can help to improve cholesterol profiles by raising HDL (the "good"

cholesterol), lowering triglycerides, and improving the efficiency of the muscles that are used. While optimizing muscle metabolism, exercise actually can help prevent or delay the development of adult onset diabetes. Regular exercise lowers blood pressure by as much as five to 15 points over the first four weeks. It may also help reduce overall vascular inflammation, which is thought to be an important risk factor for developing overt heart disease.

Exercise certainly has other benefits which are heart-friendly. In addition to helping stimulate weight loss by directly burning calories during exercise, it helps to increase your basal metabolic rate which ultimately helps you burn more calories even when you are not exercising. Exercise can help reduce stress, and is often associated with other healthy behaviors such as not smoking and eating well -- many people feel that the more they exercise, the less likely they are to crave or indulge in junk food.

It is never too late to start exercising. One German study found that people who started exercising only after age 40 still had a 55 percent reduction in developing heart disease than people who never started at all.

CONCLUSION

Any way you slice it, the more energy you expend, the greater reduction you have in your cardiovascular risk. Walking, running, dancing, biking, weights, and aerobics are all beneficial. So, enough reading about it! The best time to start exercising is now.

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