

A Little Exercise Goes a Long Way

BY DR. JOHN BRIFFA

There's a new study published online in *The Lancet* on Aug. 16, 2011, based on research from Taiwan, that shows that, compared with being sedentary, exercising for just 15 minutes a day (about 1.5 hours a week) is associated with a 14 percent reduced risk of death over the course of the study.

This study is widely being reported as evidence that even low levels of activity (lower than generally recommended) can reduce death risk. Much that I would like to think that this is so, from a scientific standpoint, this is an unsupportable conclusion.

The study in question is epidemiological, which means it is assessing associations between things (in this case, exercise habits and risk of death over time). Associations do not prove causality. We don't know from these sorts of studies if exercise is having a positive impact on health.

It might, for example, be the other way round. Maybe individuals who are healthier are more inclined to exercise. Maybe being sedentary is a sign of sickness. Basically, we just don't know. All we know is that even low levels of activity are associated with reduced risk of death.

That said, in my heart (more than my head), I believe that even relatively low levels of activity are indeed likely to benefit health and stave off death. I see



EXTREME EXERTION: One doesn't have to run a marathon on a treadmill to benefit from the effects of exercise. Marathon runner Noel Bresland runs on a treadmill inside a capsule of the London Eye, the tallest Ferris wheel in the West.

activity and exercise as a pillar of health.

Long-term studies, which randomize people into exercise or non-exercise groups and then follow them until death (to see if exercise actually reduces death risk), do not exist. However, we do have shorter-term studies that show improvements in terms of disease markers. These are changes we would expect to translate into reduced risk of disease (and perhaps death) in time.

Also, with exercise, I think there is a "law of diminishing returns." Let's say you exercise for an hour each day. How much more can be gained from exercising for, say, an hour and 15 minutes? The incremental benefit is likely to be small in comparison to the benefit from exercising for an hour.

However, if we go from no activity (sedentary behavior) to 15 minutes of daily exercise, the relative benefit is likely to be huge. This is one of the reasons I encourage normally sedentary individuals to do something.

In my last book, "Waist Disposal," I included a brief, home-based exercise session made up of a

mix of resistance exercises (like push-ups, sit-ups, and squats) and more-aerobic exercise (running on the spot). The session is designed to be 12 minutes long.

Compared to doing nothing, this brief session can do wonders for improving strength and physique, and I believe it likely impacts positively on health. This sort of regime is unlikely to allow us to qualify for next year's Olympics, but I believe its impact on health and well-being can be profound.

If we tack this sort of regime onto recreational walking and perhaps some stretching, I believe our exercise needs will be largely met.

This new study from Taiwan tells us very little about the purported benefits of exercise, and I think its findings have been overstated. However, I utterly support its message: Devoting even small amounts of time to activity and exercise is much, much better than doing nothing.

Dr. John Briffa is a London-based physician and author with an interest in nutrition and natural medicine. His website is DrBriffa.com.

MRSA Infections: Razor Blades on the Floor

BY W. GIFFORD-JONES, M.D.

So you've decided to get into shape and join the local health club? No one can fault that idea. But remember, for most things in life, including health clubs, there are pluses and minuses that result in unintended consequences.

Health clubs by necessity have a large number of hot, perspiring, less-than-clean bodies. So you don't need to be an infectious-disease specialist to know there's potential infection everywhere. This means that the health club, its clients, and you must take precautionary measures seriously.

It's hard to decipher the brains of some people. For instance, a female patient of mine stopped going to a fitness center in downtown Toronto. She was tired of repeatedly finding used razor blades on the floor of the shower. This was an expensive upscale club used by the so-called elite of the city!

But the big problem today is the possibility of contacting a staphylococcal infection, particularly a methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* infection. MRSA infections are usually picked up by exposure to dirty towels, mats, and gym equipment. A lack of individual hygiene often triggers these infections.

For instance, my female patient passed along another hygienic tidbit to me. She informed me that few of the women at the club bothered to wipe off equipment after using it. It's the old story: "Let someone else do it." Never assume it's been done.

Good sense also means placing a towel over mats, never sharing your towels, and washing hands often with an alcohol-based spray or wipe.

MRSA infections are usually transferred through small open cuts or wounds. But there may not be any significant warning signs of infection. For some people, the symptoms can resemble the flu and associated with a mild fever.

Others develop a rash or a large



SWIM SAFELY: Swimming is great exercise, but does your health-club pool meet hygienic standards?

pimple, which increases in size, becomes painful, and produces pus. If the infection enters the bloodstream, it can be fatal. So seek medical attention if there's any doubt.

What about a dip in the club's swimming pool? The majority of health-club pools are well-supervised and tested for bacterial contamination. But outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness due to bacteria and viral infections can occur if hygienic standards are not followed.

For instance, the U.S. Center for Disease Control reported in May 2010 that health authorities inspected 3,666 health clubs in 13 U.S. states. This resulted in closure of 10 percent of the health club pools. Inadequate circulation, poor filtration systems, and faulty disinfection procedures were the main problems. One wonders how many people use the bathroom, fail to wash their hands, and then enter the pool.

Don't forget to wear adequate eye protection if you're playing tennis, squash, and racquetball. North Americans suffer about 45,000 eye injuries a year during recreational activities. It's not surprising that catastrophic injuries occur, sometimes causing blindness, when balls strike the eye at a speed of from 50 to 110

miles per hour.

If you place too much on a camel's back, it eventually lies down. The same effect can happen to muscles and tendons. It can occur even if you are working with a professional trainer.

One of my 60-year-old patients decided it was time to get in shape. She hired a trainer as a precaution. This is usually a prudent move. But at each visit to my office, she confided with pride that more and more weights were being added each week to her leg exercises.

I thought she was pushing her luck at her age and advised her that overwork and too much weight might cause injury. It did. She was left with permanent muscle damage that made walking more difficult.

Before joining a health club, see your doctor for a checkup, particularly if you suffer from risk factors such as heart disease, asthma, and other chronic conditions. Then enjoy, but watch for razor blades in the shower stalls.

Dr. Gifford-Jones is a medical journalist with a private medical practice in Toronto.

His website is DocGiff.com. He may be contacted at Info@docgiff.com.

Should Alcoholics Receive a Vaccine?

Big pharma thinks so

BY MARTHA ROSENBERG

A recent report in the *Wall Street Journal* says pharma's high-flying days are over. Whereas new drugs made pharma \$11.8 billion in 2005, they only netted \$4.3 billion in 2010—almost two-thirds less.

Why? There are several reasons, says the *Journal*. Doctors have a "growing fear of prescribing new drugs with unknown side effects," the government is continuing to crackdown on pharma's illegal marketing, and private and government insurers are becoming less willing to "cough up money for an expensive new drug—particularly when a cheap and reliable generic is available."

In fact, AstraZeneca, whose controversial Seroquel still makes \$5.3 billion a year, now conducts "payer excellence academies" to teach sales reps specifically how to sell insurers and state health care systems on its latest drugs, says the *Journal*.

It comes as no surprise that pharma is looking for new sales opportunities. Maybe that's why it is now targeting the nation's millions of alcoholics and drug addicts. Like energetic kids who are "really" hyperactive and people with normal life problems who are "really" depressed, alcoholics, and drug addicts, we are now told, really have a brain disease!

"Sixty percent of people with a substance-abuse disorder also suffer from another form of mental illness, says an article in the *New York Times Science Times*, this month. Another? They are "wired differently" and may have a "developmental brain disorder," says the article, next to a photo of Amy Winehouse, lest anyone miss The Point.



But luckily, scientists are cracking the code and beginning to "find answers," says *Science Times*.

Pharma is mongering the dual diagnosis of alcoholics and addicts—they have both an addiction and a psychiatric illness—with so much unbranded advertising and Madison Avenue spin, that nationally known major rehab centers are telling their patients they have "co-occurring disorders," in a repudiation of basic substance-abuse recovery theory.

Getting the millions in bars and on street corners on antidepressants and other psychoactive drugs for their putative lack of "dopamine receptors" would certainly help pharma through its slump as it runs out of people to call sick.

Nora D. Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, has bigger ideas: Let's give alcoholics and drug addicts vaccines, she said at last year's American Psychiatric Association's meeting in New Orleans. Rehabilitation professionals fell out of their seats.

Not only do we know the brains of alcoholics and addicts are different from normal people, and that their addictions are progressive, with a little help (and more federal money) we can even identify who is "at risk," say psychopharmacology-oriented brain researchers. (Just like we identify those with pre-asthma, pre-diabetes, pre-schizophrenia,

and pre-osteoporosis.)

Let's use those gigantic government primate centers and create more unnecessary vaccines!

There's only one problem with pharma's new disease campaign. Alcoholics and addicts are neither mentally ill nor suffering from a vaccine deficiency. They recover perfectly with the help of each other in self-help groups for free (a painful word for pharma) and have done so for almost 80 years.

More importantly, for alcoholics and addicts, drugs are not the solution, they're the problem!

Martha Rosenberg is an author who lives in Chicago.

Smoking Causes More Badder Cancers

Experts have known for some time that cigarette smoking causes a variety of cancers. A new analysis points to smoking as the cause of about half of all cases of bladder cancer in both men and women.

More than 350,000 people around the world are diagnosed each year with cancer of the bladder.

A 2009 study of smokers in the New Hampshire caught the attention of Neal Freedman, a scientific investigator at the U.S. National Cancer Institute. He and colleagues noticed an unusually high number of cases of bladder cancer attributed to smoking.

They investigated the connection further by analyzing data collected on 500,000 people taking part in the National Institutes of Health's Diet and Health Study. Participants in the long-term study, begun in 1995, were between the ages of 50 and 71 at the start.

When Freedman looked at follow-up data on the participants gathered in 2006, he found that 4,500 of the men and women had developed bladder cancer.

"In our study, current smokers had four times the risk of bladder cancer than never-smokers. And this was higher than observed in previous cohorts, which were established in earlier time periods...between the 1960s, 70s, and 80s," he said.

Freedman says in those earlier studies, smokers' risk of bladder cancer was just three times

higher. The composition of cigarettes has changed since the 1960s. While levels of tar and nicotine have been reduced, there's been an increase in a number of known cancer-causing chemicals, including beta naphthylamine, which has been linked to bladder cancer. —VOA News

Bothered by Allergies? Not any more!

Visit Professor Shiming Wang's Clinics Will notice

Immediate Effect!

First Visit 100% FREE

We accept insurance.

- 40+ year of Clinical experience
- Highly respected experienced traditional Chinese medicine doctor
- Professor of American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine: 10 years
- Professor of Chendu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine: 30 years
- Director of Clinical Research Institute of Chinese Acupuncture Association

Clinic 1: 38 Waverly Place, SF, CA 94108

Clinic 2: 1528 S. El Camino Real, Suite 303, San Mateo, CA 94402



Feng's Holistic Healing Center

1314 Utah Street, San Francisco, CA 94110 • phone: 415-282-1858 • fax: 415-642-1329

Save Life - for serious consumers

Dr. Ed Feng provides alternative medicine-Feng's Foot Acupressure's unique balanced simple diet, Chinese Herbs, and foot spa Detox treatment, the Original Since 1982, almost 30 years ago, thousands of patients have been significantly improved or have

been completely cured, thanks to Dr. Feng's confidence that every patient can be healthy and happy. Dr. Feng is especially helpful to those suffering from serious illnesses, which cannot be cured by today's western medicine.