

[IMAGE]

Let's Get Physical!

You probably already know that an above-average fitness level can help prevent cardiovascular disease and heart attacks. This health measure is valuable to patients and doctors because it is a noninvasive, inexpensive, and accurate method. But how accurately does exercise capacity predict risk of death, compared to other health measures?

The authors of a recent study in *The New England Journal of Medicine* examined data on more than 6,000 men who had completed treadmill tests and were followed for an average of six years. The men were divided into two groups: those with normal exercise-test results and no cardiovascular disease, and those with abnormal test results and/or a history of cardiovascular disease. Exercise capacity was estimated based on the grade and speed settings of the treadmill.

Peak exercise capacity was the best predictor of death in both healthy individuals and those with cardiovascular disease. In other words, men who were able to work out longer and harder were the most likely to live longer. Those with cardiovascular disease were older and used more medications.

Exercise capacity may be a better predictor of risk of death in men than other established factors associated with cardiovascular disease, including smoking, hypertension, diabetes, and other exercise variables. Do not underestimate the value of regular exercise: It is clearly one of the best methods of promoting longevity and warding off disease.

Reference:

Myers J, Prakash M, Froelicher V, et al. Exercise capacity and mortality among men referred for exercise testing. *The New England Journal of Medicine* 2002;346(11), pp. 793-801.

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