[IMAGE]

Movement Is Life

By Peter W. Crownfield, Executive Editor

Without movement, there truly is no life, and it’s understandable on a purely biological level. Consider this quote from chiropractor James Chestnut, as published in a 2002 article: "Blood cells that don’t move cannot transport oxygen, lungs that don’t move can’t breathe, hearts that don’t move can’t pump blood, and spines that don’t move can’t create the motion required for proper joint nutrition, for the activities of daily living, or for the stimulation of the joint-brain pathways required for proper brain and body function." In short, movement is what enables our bodies to operate in all their delicate, wondrous complexity.

The inherent connection between movement and life is also understandable if you reflect for a moment on what happens when you engage in healthy behaviors, such as consistent physical activity and nutritious eating compared to the alternative: staying sedentary and eating not-so-healthy foods. Ample research suggests regular exercise improves circulation, enhances flexibility, and gives you a greater ability to accomplish physical tasks without risking injury; all benefits involving movement. Your blood moves throughout the body, providing vital nourishment to tissues and organs; your joints and muscles move more easily, rather than being stiff and immobile; and you move quicker and with less effort.

Hiking Group - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark It’s the same way with diet, believe it or not. Eating foods high in nutrients means they can be absorbed well by the body and delivered (moved) to cells. Eating high-fiber foods ensures timely digestion and elimination of wastes (whereas overconsumption of animal fats and low-fiber foods leads to colonic inactivity and constipation). Foods that are high in saturated fat also can contribute to plaque buildup in the arteries, reducing the ability of blood to move through the body and potentially causing a catastrophic blockage - lack of movement leading to a heart attack or stroke. Again, movement is life.

Several recent research studies reinforce the essential role movement plays in our very existence, particularly with respect to preventing disease. For example, research reported in the March 2009 issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Heart* suggests regular exercise not only helps prevent heart disease, but also increases average lifespan both in healthy patients *and* in patients already suffering from a heart condition and taking medication for their problem. According to the study, increased regular to moderate physical

activity reduced the risk of mortality in both groups, but even more so in patients taking medication for a pre-existing heart condition. Quite an example of how movement truly is life.

In another study, this one published in January 2009 in the journal *Pediatrics*, more than a thousand students (average age: 13) were evaluated to assess overall physical fitness, physical activity, and risk factors for cardiovascular disease. At ages 15, 25 and 33, these same variables were assessed again and compared with original (baseline) measurements. Physical fitness at age 13 was associated with reduced body mass index (BMI) and blood pressure (systolic and diastolic) both at baseline and at all three later ages - although it's important to point out that the strength of these associations decreased over time (and disappeared altogether by age 40), emphasizing that movement early in life needs to be sustained in order to continue providing benefits. Nonetheless, considering that high BMI is associated with a host of poor health outcomes, including type 2 diabetes and heart disease, and high blood pressure increases the risk of heart attack and stroke, the point is clear: Keep the body moving and it's more likely that good things will happen (and on the other hand, bad things won't).

Want more? How about a study suggesting sustained improvements in leisure-time physical activity in 50-year-old men reduces all-cause mortality (death) comparable to the risk reduction achieved by quitting smoking! As with the *Pediatrics* study referenced previously, consistent physical activity was key; risk of death did not improve significantly until the men had stuck with their exercise program for 10 years, but after that, the benefits only got better with time. What's more, risk of death was inversely related to level of activity, meaning men who participated in low levels of physical activity were at higher risk than men who participated in medium levels of activity, while those who exercised the most (high) were most likely to be alive and going strong well into their golden years. And of course, all three groups fared better than their inactive counterparts.

Biking - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark The best news of all is that it really doesn't take much to get moving and stay moving. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* suggests adults participate in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week, preferably in episodes of at least 10 minutes at a time and spread throughout the week. Now think about it: that's only an average of 30 minutes a day, five days a week, and what's more, it doesn't relegate you to a treadmill or exercise bike for the same old routine day after day. Basically, anything that gets your heart pumping and keeps it pumping for a sustained period counts (Read "Find Your Fat-Burning, Muscle-Building Zone" in the July issue for specific information on aerobic exercise and heart rate). You

can take a brisk walk, jog, ride your bike, do housework, garden, play with the kids, or do any number of activities to get the health-promoting benefits associated with the simple act of *movement*.

Peter W. Crownfield is the executive editor of *To Your Health*. Direct all comments and questions to editor -at- toyourhealth.com.

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