

[IMAGE]

Exercise: Better Than Weight Loss for Heart Disease?

By Editorial Staff

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. Since being overweight / obese is a major risk factor for heart disease, one would assume weight loss would be a primary method to reduce disease risk or prolong years of life for people suffering from the disease. Not so fast.

A new study actually positions *exercise*, not weight loss, as the best way for heart disease sufferers to live longer. Researchers writing in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* discovered weight loss did not improve mortality rates over a 16-year tracking period (and in fact, normal-weight patients who lost weight were more likely to die, while normal-weight patients who gained weight were less likely to die).

However, exercise was associated with better odds of survival: a 19 percent reduced risk of death for patients who performed at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise weekly compared to inactive patients. Patients who exercised for more than 150 minutes per week reduced their risk of dying during the study period by an even greater percentage: 36 percent.

Two morals to this story: First, maintaining a healthy weight can reduce your odds of developing heart disease in the first place, and of course, exercise should be a key element of any weight-maintenance program. Second, if you've already developed heart disease, exercise is your best bet to prolong your life. Your doctor can help outline the exercise program most suitable for your health needs.

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