



Harvard Heart Letter

VOLUME 17 • NUMBER 3 | NOVEMBER 2006

Putting activity in your day

Daily activities like gardening or taking the stairs are good for your heart, lengthen life, and keep you mobile.

Few of us take advantage of the closest thing we have to a magic bullet—exercise—for preventing or controlling heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, and a host of other physical woes.

If you can't stand the thought of toiling hamster-like on a treadmill, walking purposefully around a mall, or doing other forms of formal exercise, take heart: Daily activity matters, too. So walk the dog. Mop the floor. Take the stairs. Garden. Go dancing. A quartet of studies published in the last few months support the idea that doing whatever you can to burn more calories each day can help you live longer with less pain and a healthier heart and blood vessels.

Active evidence

The “no pain, no gain” philosophy once dominated exercise recommendations. Vigorous workouts, we were told, were what we needed. Over the last decade, that advice has been elbowed aside by “no sweat,” which says that moderate activities such as brisk walking are equally good for you. In part, experts have offered “no sweat” recommendations because they weren't having much luck getting people to exercise vigorously. They hoped that lowering the intensity would encourage more people to be active. Now there's mounting evidence for no sweat's benefits.

Activity lengthens life. In most studies, researchers have to rely on participants' memories (and truthfulness) about their exercise and physical activity. In an effort to measure activity directly, a team funded by the National Institute on Aging asked 302 seventy-somethings to drink water made with “heavy” hydrogen and oxygen. Two weeks later, the researchers measured how much of these elements remained in the volunteers'

bodies. From this they were able to calculate how many calories the volunteers burned each day over and above what they needed to keep their bodies running. Over the next six years, 25% of those in the low-energy group (who had burned under 520 calories a day in activity or exercise) died, compared with just 12% of those in the high-energy group (who had burned more than 770 calories a day). The most active seniors didn't exercise any more than the least active. Instead, they were more likely to take the stairs, work for pay, or do other daily activities.

Walk the dog. Nearly half of dog owners walk their pets for at least 30 minutes a day, exactly the amount the Surgeon General recommends for exercise. A big, energetic pooch can tug you along at a pace that more than qualifies as moderate exercise. Even if you have a smaller or less lively dog, two or three daily 10-minute walks are far better than sitting.

Move early. A long-term study from the Chianti region of Italy indicates that adults who are active during midlife are more likely to have better mobility and fewer physical limitations in their 70s. (The researchers didn't mention if drinking the local wine made a difference.)

Shake a leg. Leg pain when walking, caused by cholesterol-clogged arteries, plagues millions of Americans. Not only does it limit what they can do, but it also substantially increases their chances of having a heart attack or dying early of cardiovascular disease. Formal exercise programs are one way to battle this condition, also known as peripheral artery disease and claudication. It turns out that daily activity also helps. Using a type of motion sensor known as an accelerometer, Northwestern University researchers

INSIDE

Simplicity still rules for heart disease forecast 3
New heart disease tests add little to the predictive power of blood pressure, cholesterol, and other traditional risk factors.

Take it with a grain of salt 4
Cutting back on our most common seasoning is a necessity for some, but not all.

Heart Beat 6
Baby, it's cold outside; Getting away from secondhand smoke; Take aspirin *before* ibuprofen, not after; Portion distortion; Spicy medicine, or just spice? **In Brief:** Blood pressure and cholesterol; Seat belts and pacemakers; Food fats and HDL.

Ask the Doctor. 8
What is vasospastic angina?

Newly Revised Special Health Reports from Harvard Medical School

Knees and Hips: A troubleshooting guide to knee and hip pain

Weigh Less, Live Longer: Strategies for successful weight loss

To order, call 877-649-9457 (toll free) or online at www.health.harvard.edu.

Visit us online at www.health.harvard.edu



Editor in Chief Thomas H. Lee, MD
Editor P.J. Skerrett
 pjskerrett@hms.harvard.edu
Associate Editor Richard T. Lee, MD
Editorial Board Eugene Braunwald, MD
 William P. Castelli, MD
 Lawrence H. Cohn, MD
 Roman W. DeSanctis, MD
 Stephen E. Goldfinger, MD
 Caitlin Hosmer Kirby, MS, RD
 Beverly Lorell, MD
 Jane W. Newburger, MD
 Patrick T. O’Gara, MD
 Paul M. Ridker, MD
 Harvey B. Simon, MD
 George E. Thibault, MD
 Walter C. Willett, MD, DrPH

Board members are associated with Harvard Medical School and affiliated institutions. They review all published articles.

Copy Editor Robin Netherton
Design Editor Heather Derocher
Production Coordinator Patrick Foley

Subscription questions

Phone: 877-649-9457 (toll free)
E-mail: harvardHH@strategicfulfillment.com
Online: www.health.harvard.edu/subinfo
Mail: Harvard Heart Letter
 P.O. Box 9308
 Big Sandy, TX 75755-9308
Subscriptions \$32 per year (U.S.)

Bulk subscriptions

StayWell Consumer Health Publishing
 1 Atlantic St., Suite 604
 Stamford, CT 06901
 888-456-1222, ext. 106 (toll free)
 203-975-8854, ext. 106
 ddewitt@swchp.com

Corporate sales and licensing

StayWell Consumer Health Publishing
 1 Atlantic St., Suite 604
 Stamford, CT 06901
 jmitchell@staywell.com

Editorial correspondence

E-mail: heart_letter@hms.harvard.edu
Letters: Harvard Heart Letter
 10 Shattuck St., Suite 612
 Boston, MA 02115

Permissions

Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.
Online: www.copyright.com

Published by Harvard Health Publications,
 a division of Harvard Medical School

Editor in Chief Anthony L. Komaroff, MD
Publishing Director Edward Coburn

©2006 President and Fellows of Harvard College. (ISSN 1051-5313)
 Proceeds support the research efforts of Harvard Medical School.

Harvard Health Publications
 10 Shattuck St., Suite 612, Boston, MA 02115

The goal of the Harvard Heart Letter is to interpret medical information for the general reader in a timely and accurate fashion. Its contents are not intended to provide personal medical advice, which should be obtained directly from a physician. We are interested in comments and suggestions about the content; unfortunately, we cannot respond to all inquiries.

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40906010
 RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
 CIRCULATION DEPT., 1415 JANETTE AVE., WINDSOR, ON N8X 1Z1
 E-mail: ddewitt@swchp.com

Daily activity *continued*

measured a week’s worth of daily activity in 460 men and women with peripheral artery disease. Those who racked up the most “activity units” were far less likely to have had a cardiovascular event—a heart attack, surgery to open or bypass a blocked artery, or hospitalization for chest pain or heart failure—over the next five years or to have died during that period. Most of the motion came from walking to the store, climbing the stairs, or other daily activities, not from formal exercise.

What it’s worth

“Make exercise part of your day.” It certainly *sounds* simple. But you know it’s easier said than done. There are plenty of obstacles, like arthritic joints, lack of time, difficulty finding a safe or convenient place to work out, or leg or chest pain when you move too fast. If you can’t get beyond the barriers to exercise, try adding activity. You don’t need to check with your doctor, buy equipment, go anywhere special, or set aside blocks of time. Just try moving more throughout the day.

A half-hour of vacuuming or sweeping the sidewalk burns 110–180 calories,

depending on your weight (see table). A half-hour of waltzing or other slow ballroom dancing burns 80–140 calories. Folk or square dancing twirls it up to 125–200 calories. That’s also how much you can burn during a half-hour of general gardening or playing the drums. Push a wheelchair for 15 minutes, and say goodbye to 60–90 calories.

What about climbing stairs? The average person uses 10 calories a minute doing this. It isn’t much, but that’s the point—doing little things constantly throughout the day is a good way to burn through extra calories.

The health benefits of activity begin to kick in at around 100 calories a day. That’s the equivalent of walking a mile or square dancing for 15–30 minutes. The more energy you expend, the better. A long-term study of Harvard alumni showed the lowest death rates in those who burned about 300 calories a day in exercise or activity.

If you tend to be a sitter, adding “activity bits” during the day is a great way to start burning more calories, lower your risk of cardiovascular disease, and keep you mobile. ♥

Activity	Calories burned in 30 minutes		
	125 pounds	165 pounds	200 pounds
Cross-country skiing (moderate)	227	300	364
Carrying groceries upstairs	213	281	341
Fishing while wading in a stream	170	225	273
Chopping wood, splitting logs	170	225	273
Cleaning gutters	142	187	227
Actively walking/running/playing with children	142	187	227
Painting walls	128	169	205
Operating a snow blower	128	169	205
Planting seedlings, shrubs	128	169	205
Dancing, fast (disco, folk, polka, square, etc.)	128	169	205
Sweeping the garage or sidewalk	114	150	182
Caring for a disabled adult	114	150	182
Mopping the floor	99	131	159
Rowing a canoe	99	131	159
Dancing, slow (waltz, foxtrot, samba, etc.)	85	112	136
Ironing	66	86	105



Source: from Harvard Heart Letter, Harvard Health Publications, Copyright 2006 by President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved.

Harvard authorizes you to view or download a single copy of the Harvard Content on EBSCOhost solely for your personal, noncommercial use if you include the following copyright notice: "Copyright, President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved" and other copyright and proprietary rights notices which were contained in the Harvard Content. Reproduction and/or redistribution of the Harvard Content is expressly prohibited. Any special rules for the use of other items provided on EBSCOhost may be included elsewhere within the site and are incorporated into these Terms and Conditions.

The Harvard Content is protected by copyright under both United States and foreign laws. Title to the Harvard Content remains with President and Fellows, Harvard College. Any use of the Harvard Content not expressly permitted by these Terms and Conditions is a breach of these Terms and Conditions and may violate copyright, trademark, and other laws. Harvard Content and features are subject to change or termination without notice in the editorial discretion of Harvard. All rights not expressly granted herein are reserved to President and Fellows, Harvard College.

If you violate any of these Terms and Conditions, your permission to use the Harvard Content automatically terminates and you must immediately destroy any copies you have made of any portion of the Harvard Content.

MEDICAL DISCLAIMER

The information contained in this online site is intended to provide accurate and helpful health information for the general public. It is made available with the understanding that the author and publisher are not engaged in rendering medical, health, psychological, or any other kind of personal professional services on this site. The information should not be considered complete and does not cover all diseases, ailments, physical conditions or their treatment. It should not be used in place of a call or visit to a medical, health or other competent professional, who should be consulted before adopting any of the suggestions in this site or drawing inferences from it.

The information about drugs contained on this site is general in nature. It does not cover all possible uses, actions, precautions, side effects, or interactions of the medicines mentioned, nor is the information intended as medical advice for individual problems or for making an evaluation as to the risks and benefits of taking a particular drug.

The operator(s) of this site and the publisher specifically disclaim all responsibility for any liability, loss or risk, personal or otherwise, which is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of the use and application of any of the material on this site.