
Run For Your Life

Exercisers live longer and with fewer disabilities, study finds

By Amanda Gardner
HealthDay Reporter

MONDAY, Aug. 11 (HealthDay News) -- It may, in fact, be possible to outrun death -- and even the creeping ravages of time -- at least for a while.

Research spanning two decades has found that older runners live longer and suffer fewer disabilities than healthy non-runners.

And the findings probably apply to a variety of aerobic exercises, including walking, said the study authors, from Stanford University School of Medicine, whose findings are published in the Aug. 11 issue of the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

"This is telling you that being a runner, being active is going to reduce your disability, and it's going to increase your survival," said Marcia Ory, professor of social and behavioral health at the Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Rural Public Health in College Station. "Late in life, you still see the benefit of vigorous activity."

In 1980, the study's lead author, Dr. James Fries, emeritus professor of medicine at Stanford, wrote a landmark paper outlining his "compression of morbidity" hypothesis. The theory held that regular exercise would compress, or reduce, the amount of time near the end of life when a person was disabled or unable to carry out the activities of daily living, such as walking, dressing and getting out of a chair.

"Illness would be compressed between later age of onset and age of death, and that paradigm was controversial, because it went against conventional wisdom and had no proof," Fries explained.

At the time, many experts believed that vigorous exercise would actually harm older individuals. And running, in particular, would result in an epidemic of joint and bone injuries.

But this new study proves otherwise.

Two hundred and eighty-four runners and 156 healthy "controls," or non-runners, in California completed annual questionnaires over a 21-year period. The participants were 50 years old or over at the beginning of the study and ran an average of about four hours a week. By the end of the study period, the participants were in their 70s or 80s or older and ran about 76 minutes a week.

At 19 years, just 15 percent of the runners had died, compared with 34 percent of the non-runners.

Also, said Fries, who is almost 70, runs 20 miles a week and plays tennis, "Running delayed the onset of disability by an average of 16 years, and that is largely a conservative number, because the control group was pretty darn healthy."

And the slew of predicted orthopedic injuries never materialized.

Surprisingly, the health gap between runners and non-runners only increased with time. "I always thought that the two curves would start to parallel each other and that eventually aging would overpower exercise," Fries said. "I think that will happen, but we can't find even a little twitch

toward that gap narrowing in the present time."

Which is not to say that running is the only activity that's good for you.

"Vigorous activity has a really dramatic impact, but we can't ignore that there are also helpful benefits to people who are active at all levels, meaning those people who are just out walking" said Ory. "It's so important to be physically active your whole life, not just in your 20s or 40s, but forever."

Added Dr. Suzanne Steinbaum, director of women and heart disease at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City: "Exercise is like the most potent drug. Exercise is by far the best thing you can do."

More information

Visit the U.S. National Institute on Aging for more on healthy aging.

SOURCES: James Fries, M.D., emeritus professor of medicine, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, Calif.; Suzanne Steinbaum, D.O., director, women and heart disease, Lenox Hill Hospital, New York City; Marcia G. Ory, Ph.D., professor of social and behavioral health, Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Rural Public Health, College Station; Aug. 11, 2008, *Archives of Internal Medicine*



International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association
To Grow, Protect and Promote the Industry.

This article brought to you by IHRSA and Technogym - IHRSA · 263 Summer Street · Boston · MA · 02210