HEALTH NOTES

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The FIT Formula

for a healthy heart!

The normal heart is a strong, hard-working pump made of muscle. About the size of a person's fist, the heart has blood vessels that provide the heart itself with the blood supply it needs to be healthy and work hard, pumping blood throughout the body to "feed" our organs with nutrition (absorbed from the digestive tract) and oxygen (collected as blood circulates through the lungs), and to run the blood through the body's "filters", the liver and kidneys, to remove waste products that accumulate as a result of normal body functions.

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for developing coronary artery disease, or "**CAD**", characterized by deposits of fatty substances (e.g., cholesterol), calcium and other substances in the lining of the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle itself. Physical inactivity also contributes to other health risks such as obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and low levels of **HDL** (high density lipo-proteins, the "good cholesterol").
The American Heart Association has documented that even moderately intense exercise such as brisk walking is beneficial when done regularly for 30 minutes or longer five to seven days a week. Published in the New England Journal of Medicine, the Harvard Alumni Study found that people lived two hours longer for every hour of regular exercise they did! Two for one… a simple formula for better health. Why wouldn't you get up and get moving?

WHY IS EXERCISE IMPORTANT?
Regular physical activity increases your fitness level and capacity for exercise. It also plays a role in prevention of heart disease. Physical inactivity is a major factor for heart disease and stroke. Regular activity can help control blood cholesterol, diabetes and obesity. Aerobic physical activity can also help reduce blood pressure. Many studies have shown that people who modify risky behaviors and start regular activity, even after a heart attack, have better rates of survival and better quality of life!

HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY PHYSICAL FITNESS?
Programs designed to improve physical fitness take into account frequency (how often), intensity (how hard) and time (how long) spent exercising. This is what we refer to as the FIT formula:

F = frequency (days per week that you exercise)
I = intensity (how hard, e.g., easy, moderate or vigorous)
T = time (amount for each exercise session or day)

These activities are especially beneficial when done regularly:

- brisk walking, hiking, stair-climbing, aerobic exercise
- jogging, running, bicycling, rowing or swimming
- activities such as soccer or basketball that include continuous running

Even moderately intense activities, when done daily, can have some long-term health benefits. Examples include walking for pleasure, gardening/yard work, housework, dancing and prescribed home exercise programs.

KINDS OF EXERCISE

Aerobics – defined as an activity in which a person is using a large number of muscle groups for a duration of at least 20 minutes; the goal is to be working hard enough to increase your heart rate to 60-75% of its maximum, and repeat this activity at least three times a week for 20 min.
Strength training – an activity in which we lift a heavy object 8-10 times before we feel muscle fatigue (if you can lift the weight 15-20 times before feeling fatigue, use a heavier weight); helps preserve bone and muscle mass (we lose about 1/3 lb. of muscle every year after age 40!); do these exercises 2-3 times each week for significant benefit
Balance and flexibility training – before and after *any* kind of exercise, we should stretch our muscles; particularly with the elderly, balance and flexibility training such as walking on a low balance-beam or T'ai Chi-type exercises, can actually improve coordination and reduce the likelihood of falls and bone fractures

WHAT RISK FACTORS CAN I REDUCE?

- high blood pressure (regular aerobic activities can lower blood pressure)
- cigarette smoking (smokers who become physically active are more likely to cut down or stop smoking)
- diabetes (people at their ideal weight are less likely to develop diabetes, and physical activity may also decrease insulin requirements for people with diabetes)
- obesity (regular exercise can help people lose excess fat and stay at a reasonable weight)
- high triglyceride levels (physical activity helps reduce triglyceride levels, which have been linked to the development of coronary artery disease in some people)
- low HDL levels (low levels of this "good cholesterol", i.e., less than 40 mg/dL for men, less than 50 mg/dL for women, have been linked to a higher risk of coronary artery disease; recent studies show that regular physical activity can significantly increase HDL cholesterol levels and reduce your risk)

"Being thin is not necessarily the solution," notes Steven Blair, PhD, Sr. Scientific Editor of the Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health. "We need to stop hounding people about their weight and encourage them to eat a healthful diet, *and exercise*!"
START! Is an American Heart Association movement to get America walking – the message is simple: walk more, eat well, live longer! Check with your doctor or other healthcare provider if you have a heart condition, have had a stroke, feel extremely short of breath after mild exercise, or have been told that you have a medical condition that could be made worse by increased activity. If none of these conditions apply to you, you can start on a gradual program of increased activity tailored to your needs and interests! For more information about **START!** or other programs, go to

www.americanheart.org
www.thedoctorwillseeyounow.com
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/heartdisease
www.heart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=33053106