

A brief history of the exercise recommendation

By Michael Clark

It's interesting how we take health information for granted. Anecdotes are everywhere, most with little to no science backing them. Take water consumption for example; the long-standing recommendation is eight eight-ounce glasses per day. Many, including some health practitioners, believe this recommendation is totally accurate. While I am sure it is/was well intended, the daily eight is anecdotal; handed down from who knows where. Currently, the Institute of Medicine (IOM), and the only institution with an actual dietary recommendation, for water suggest that men consume the equivalent of 13 eight-ounce glasses a day, or roughly 40 percent more than the daily eight. For women, the IOM suggests the equivalent of nine glasses or 15 percent more than the old standard. And while this article is not about water consumption, the above example does illustrate how health myths can become public fact.

I think the everyday exercise recommendation, classically described as thirty minutes, five days a week, is a lot like the water recommendation concerning its presence in everyday life. It's the "go to" for CNN's chief medical correspondent Sanjay Gupta, first lady Michelle Obama, and others who try to promote exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle. But where does it come from, and why does it exist in the first place? And is it, like

the old "Daily Eight," based on nothing? Fortunately for us, the past and current exercise recommendation is based on six decades of observation and research, rather than anecdote.

To go back a bit, the first serious notions of exercise for health in America began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when it was a topic of conversation among physicians and health educators. During the early nineteenth hundreds, physical hygiene, as it was called at the time, was promoted for performance in prestigious University settings and the military, with no regard to health or the public's welfare. But later, in a 1952 landmark study, researchers (Morris et al) showed that when male workers become more sedentary, their risks of heart disease and death increased in a predictable way. From that point the scientific evidence began to emerge, indicating that exercise and fitness had much more to offer than performance.

However, there were some problems associated with telling everyone to exercise in the late 1950's and 1960's. Despite emerging benefits, many physicians worried that physical exertion above the normal daily activities may make those with heart disease worse, so they often advised rest rather than exercise. What's more, cardiovascular disease was still on the rise during the middle of the 20th century, and many health professionals felt that formal exercise may actually cause heart attacks

in men above the age of 45. But, at that time there was an incomplete picture of what causes heart disease, as well as a lack of consensus on the finer points of the exercise prescription, namely how difficult an exercise should feel while it's being performed.

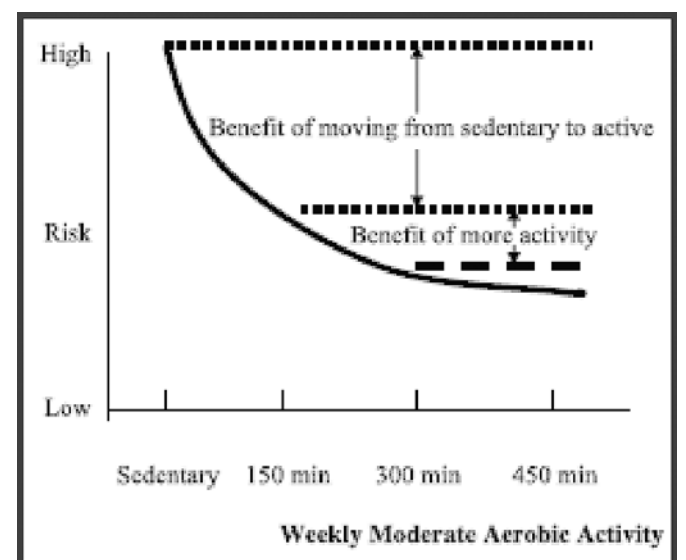
In the early seventies, studies began to show that structured exercise programs lead to better outcomes in many patient groups, primarily those with a history of heart disease. Since that time, thirty-plus health and fitness related recommendations have been issued. Most of them issued by organizations like the American Heart Association, the American College of Sports Medicine, and the YMCA. Surprisingly, today's recommendation has not changed all that much from earlier editions, and for good reason. Put simply, as an individual goes from being sedentary to active the risk of death and disease drop in a predictable manner. Remember 1952?

The graph to the right represents why the physical activity recommendation came into existence, and why it really hasn't changed too much in the last 50 years.

Looking closely, you will see that as minutes of moderate physical activity increase (walking at three to four miles per hour), health risks, namely death and disease decrease.

So, in a world of advertisements, expert opinion, vitamins and supplements, you can rest assured that not everything you hear is taken from anecdote. Being physically active 30 minutes a day, five days a week at a pace that makes you breath harder, has been shown time and again to prolong life and reduce disease. And the best part; it does not have to cost anything.

Michael Clark is a Certified Clinical Exercise Specialist and Personal Trainer at the Duke Center for Living Health and Fitness at Fearington. For more information, call 919.545.2133.



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Hydrate or die

By Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC

How you manage yourself and your energy level says much about how productive you will be with your time. An energetic you is a more effective you. Unfortunately, all around us messages lure us towards energy-zapping temptations. Energy zappers come in many forms:

■ **Too little sleep.** For proper functioning, you need to get the right amount of sleep on most days. When you are sleep-deprived, you incur changes in brain waves and literally cannot be as effective. Your immune system and mental skills also decline.

■ **Edible energy zappers.** The wrong foods can zap your energy and diminish your productivity. The rise of pizza delivery services, for example, directly contributes to sluggishness. Eating heavy breads, pastas, or meats, especially for lunch, causes a predictable slump as your body diverts its energy to breaking down these heavy foods.

■ **Drinkable energy zappers.** Coffee, to be frank, is a drug. It is highly acidic and too harsh a substance to be pouring into your delicate stomach lining. Coffee may be king of morning beverages and a "pick me up" throughout the day, but it cannot compete with a glass of sparkling, clear water to aid your performance.

My colleague and friend nutritionist David Meinz says that every chemical reaction occurring in your body, including all that goes on during the work day, involves water. The brain itself is 75 percent water. Unfortunately, our thirst mechanisms lag behind our true need for water. Even a two percent reduction in the amount of body water renders a pronounced lack of productivity. A five percent reduction in our body's water supply

results in acute decreased mental functioning. Your productivity at work is directly linked to your degree of hydration.

Eight cups of water a day has been the standard, (see Michael Clark's article, above) but most people wait until their thirst reminds them — a bad strategy to for remaining alert and productive. Drink before you're thirsty. When you work out hard, it takes your body 24 hours to regain the water supply it needs. If you constantly work out, you are constantly in need of more water than you think.

Meinz advises subscribing to the best water delivery service in the area, or buying bottled water. The best choices for bottled water are distilled water or spring water. If you drink tap water, let the faucet run for about thirty seconds to clear out possible sediments.

Air-conditioned rooms usually have some humidity added, but heated rooms are generally dry. You need to drink more when you stay in heated rooms for prolonged periods. Women are at risk for dehydration since they have a lower water content due to a smaller lean muscle mass than men.

Regardless of what you're working on or where, keep water nearby and take several sips when you can. Here's the truth in black and white: it is better to frequent the restroom than to experience even mild dehydration.

Don't wait until you know you're thirsty. Thirst is actually your body's alert that you're dehydrated. So drink up.

Jeff Davidson is "The Work-Life Balance Expert®," has written 56 books, and as a professional speaker has made 774 presentations. His websites are www.BreathingSpace.com and www.Work-LifeBalance.net.

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