

Preventing (More) Heart Disease

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Bottom Line at the Top: Take responsibility for your health and preventing heart disease by exercising. No pill achieves all the beneficial physiological effects of exercise, so don't delude yourself into thinking you have the option of the doctor doing it for you.

In cardiac patients, unhealthy lifestyle choices lead to death. In people who have not yet had their heart attacks, inaction propels them to it sooner. But all is not lost if you have heart disease or a propensity for it. **Regular, moderately strenuous, leisure-time physical activity halves the 5-year risk of death, stroke, heart attack and heart failure, compared to sedentary slugs.**

Most doctors counsel patients to exercise. But with < 15 minute office visits, maybe 4 times a year, that's like throwing paint against the wall and hoping some will stick. Occasionally a single, ominous dictum like, "If you don't start exercising and change your diet, you are going to die" propels a Pillsbury dough-boy into the gym. Shame may keep him there, or he may actually decide he likes the new image. More often, though, the fear dissipates, along with motivation to move, and the old inertia creeps back.

A recovered heart attack victim should start cardiac rehabilitation as soon as possible. Once doctors confirm that monitored activity poses no risk, anyone who wants to avoid a future cardiac death should keep moving.

Change (not exercise) is hard, requiring motivation and consistent mental effort. **Incorporating exercise into our day requires micro-and macro-revision of our routines until activity is an integral, rather than disruptive part of our lives.**

Hopefully repetition internalizes the belief that physical activity *is*, rather than *should be* a regular part of our day. Unfortunately, our glued-to-the-computer, TV-addicted, auto-crazed society lures people into sedentary oblivion. Even with the best of intentions and New Year's resolutions, most people fail to sustain active lifestyles.

After a few weeks most exercisers *feel better, sleep better, are less anxious, display less irritability and work more efficiently.* One would think that would be enough to make it a life-long passion.

If you smoke, are a male over 40 years old, are overweight, have high cholesterol or are diabetic, please get checked by your doctor before you undertake an exercise program any more strenuous than walking.