

## **The Catholic Doctor is In: The Fountain of Youth**

The closest thing to the fountain of youth is exercise. I think I just heard the sound of hundreds of Today's Catholic newspapers slamming shut. Exercise is a word that many don't want to hear and certainly don't want to do. Please bear with me as I make my case. A patient of mine, who despises exercise, once told me that if he ever gets the urge to exercise he just lies down and rests until the urge goes away. Sound familiar? There is nothing I can think of that consistently provides more health benefits than exercise.

The American College of Cardiology has published guidelines suggesting 150 minutes of aerobic exercise each week. That can be accomplished by exercising 50 minutes three times per week. A recent study on running suggests that you can get tremendous benefit with even substantially less than that. This study put runners into multiple categories based on how much running per week the participants did. There was the category of those that infrequently took a jog, to the extreme category of running 100 or more miles per week. The group that averaged running for 25 minutes two times per week or just 50 min per week nearly got as much benefit as those that ran nearly daily. Somewhat counter intuitive was the finding that the ultra-marathoners (runners who engage in running races longer than the 26 mile marathon) actually had a higher risk of heart attack, cardiac arrhythmias, and cardiac arrest when compared to the more casual runners that ran about 2-5 miles three or four times per week. For example, I have seen multiple cases of exercise induced atrial fibrillation in those that engage in marathon running or participate in long distance biking. So it looks like you can overdo it. But, let's not lose sight of the fact that ALL runners have less risk than you dedicated couch potatoes out there who avoid exercise at any cost. Let's also be clear, you do not have to run. Walking, swimming, biking, or using your favorite aerobic exercise machine will do just fine.

Exercise, in my opinion is the closest thing to the fountain of youth that we have. Almost every person I know over the age of 80 that remains vigorous, has either exercised regularly, or has lived a very very active lifestyle. When I see a 90 year old walk into my office with a normal gait and then get up on the exam table with ease, odds are they have been dedicated to exercise.

Many disease processes are somehow tied into inflammation. For example, it is a fact that active inflammation in the body increases the risk of heart attack. Exercise has been scientifically proven to reduce inflammation. There are inflammatory markers like C-reactive protein that improve in people who begin to exercise regularly. Studies have also shown that exercise can reduce your risk of getting dementia, and if you have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's dementia, it can slow its progression. One of my strong

motivating factors to exercise is my strong family history of dementia. It's the one disease process that scares me the most as I age.

There is a worldwide epidemic of Type II Diabetes. Exercise with significant weight loss has been proven to be a more effective treatment plan than all the pills available to treat it. Some endocrinologists look at belly fat or visceral fat as an actual organ that is biologically active. The visceral fat pumps out immune system chemicals called cytokines that are bad for you. Belly fat also contributes to increasing the bad cholesterol (LDL). Most Type II Diabetics are overweight, and IF they would lose enough weight they would no longer have diabetes. When I tell my patients this many of them have never heard it before. In my opinion, weight loss should be the first plan for an overweight diabetic. This should be stressed more when diabetes is first diagnosed. They should leave the doctor's office with an exercise prescription or be referred to an exercise program to burn calories and therefore lose weight.

The old saying; "No pain, no gain" is actually not true. Mild to moderate exercise reaps great rewards. You do not have to feel like you are dying when you exercise and you do not have to feel bad the next day. Let's finish up as I frequently do with a bible verse. And, yes, I am trying to make you feel guilty if you don't exercise. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 "You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within—the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price! So glorify God in your body."

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