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Time and Exercise

One of the most common reasons people give for not exercising is time. "I don't have time." "I'm too busy." However, it turns out that it may cost much more time to not exercise than it does to exercise... lots of time. Perhaps up to 5 or more years!

Longitudinal studies in both the United States and Europe have reported that time spent getting moderate exercise is actually quite a good investment. A recent European analysis concluded that jogging between 60 - 150 minutes per week was associated with longevity gains of over five years of life. Similarly, an analysis just published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine reported gains in longevity from two to five years for people getting 150 minutes per week of moderate physical activity (brisk walking). This flies in the face of the common "I don't have time exercise" excuse, as these studies suggest that "exercise gains time."

Of course, there is an important chronological consideration here. I may not have time right now to exercise in order to add years to my life far into the future. This consideration is important for many health behaviors. Immediate costs/benefits of behavioral choices tend to have a much greater impact on us than do future costs/benefits. However, not considering future consequences can certainly be costly.

It is important to note that the aforementioned studies do not prove causation, that is, the studies can't definitively conclude that exercise directly extends life. Other factors may

contribute to the relationship between exercise and living longer, such as people who are already healthier may be more likely to exercise regularly. Another important reminder is that these studies report group data, and cannot directly predict the impact of exercise on the longevity of a specific individual. Nonetheless, in spite of these considerations, the data are quite impressive with respect to the association between moderate physical activity and life expectancy. Furthermore, there is extensive research substantiating the numerous health and quality of life benefits of exercise, independent of life expectancy.

Yet another consideration with time and exercise is that getting regular physical activity can help one be more efficient and productive with other activities, so that other activities may end up costing less time. Energy, cognition, and emotion all tend to be enhanced with regular physical activity.

My hope is that this brief article will at least create a second thought the next time the “I don’t have time” excuse to skip exercising comes to mind. Exercise actually appears to create time, so that it is more time expensive to not exercise than it is to go ahead and take that run or walk.

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