

Walking Helps The Heart!

Special To The Post
Walking is an everyday activity that you can transform into a regular exercise program to help develop and maintain fitness.

It is an aerobic exercise that can condition the heart and lungs if performed at the proper intensity for 20 to 30 minutes at a time, at least three times a week. Conditioning increases the oxygen available to the body and enables the heart to use oxygen more efficiently.

Unfortunately, aerobic exercise alone cannot prevent or cure heart disease. If the major risk factors - high blood pressure, a high blood cholesterol level, diabetes, and cigarette smoking - are ignored, exercise alone probably won't help much.

But a regular exercise program can be a step toward a happier, healthier life. Besides the cardiovascular benefits, regular exercise such as walking can:

- Give you more energy and increase your resistance to fatigue.
- Improve tension and help you relax and sleep
- Tone your muscles.

Before beginning an exercise program, see your doctor if you are not accustomed to regular exercise and are a male over 45 years old or a female over 50 years old. Also see your doctor first if you have heart trouble, diabetes or high blood pressure, or suffer from pain, extreme breathlessness or dizziness.

To ensure a successful walking program, choose a specific time of day and stick with it. When do you have the most energy? Some people like to walk in the morning to prepare themselves for the day ahead. Some walk during their lunch hours. Others like to walk when the day is over to relieve tension.

You should choose the best time for you, depending on your schedule and state of mind.

You will want to continue your exercise program year-round, so find a place where you can walk all the time. For outdoor walking, find a course with a smooth, soft surface that does not intersect with traffic, if possible.

When weather permits outdoor walking, walk around an indoor track at a school or recreation center. Many people are putting on their walking shoes and walking around shopping malls.

Weekly Classes

The Mecklenburg County Agriculture Extension Service will offer a series of weekly classes in forest management at 7 p.m. on Wednesday evenings, January 9 through February 27. The Master Forest Manager Program will be presented at the Agricultural Extension Auditorium, 301 Billingsley Rd.

Topics to be covered include wildlife management, tax and estate planning, reforestation, hardwood management, timber marketing and investment analysis.

The registration fee of \$25 will cover all costs including two optional one-day field trips. For registration information, contact Tom Martin at 336-2561, Monday through Friday, 8 am. to 5 p.m.



Some children just can't resist posing for the camera. Here, Toria Douglass, Shaquana Welch, James Golphin, Travis Gilmore, Dwayne Richardson, and Dominique Powell stop spinning long enough for the

shutter to click. The children attend Fairyland Day Care Center on W. Kingston Ave. (Photo by Audrey Lodato)

Duke Clinic To Study Depression In The Elderly

By Charles Blackburn
Duke Medical Center
Special To The Post

At Christmas time she had been a very happy, energetic 86 year old who enjoyed life and her family. But a few months later she suddenly lost her appetite and became withdrawn.

Her weight dropped to 94 pounds, she grew extremely frail, and a word or two was the most anyone could get out of her.

Her family thought she was suffering from some form of dementia or a fatal disease. It looked as though they would soon have to consider placing her in a nursing home.

For another woman, age 70, the symptoms were a little different. She paced the floor constantly, wringing her hands, and she couldn't pay attention when someone spoke to her. Her local mental health center diagnosed her as having senile dementia and gave her two or three years to live, at most.

Both stories had happy endings, however.

Doctors at Duke University Medical Center discovered that the two women weren't physically ill or mentally deranged. They were suffering from severe depression, a disorder afflicting the elderly in increasing numbers.

"Both of these patients responded very well to treatment. In a few months, they perked up and were their old selves again," said Dr. Dan Blazer, professor of psychiatry and author of "Depression in Late Life." "But if the problem hadn't been identified, it's likely both would have ended up in nursing homes."

Instead, the two are now enjoying active lives with family and friends.

These cases are dramatic examples of what doctors say will become a more widespread problem in the years ahead as the population ages. According to government figures, Americans age 75 and over constitute the most rapidly increa-

sing age group in the nation. Already the suicide rate among the elderly is higher than for any other age group, according to Blazer.

"Severe depression is very treatable," he said. "It's not like Alzheimer's Disease or other forms of dementia. Through therapy, we can in many cases give older people additional years of very productive life. But their symptoms are often misread by their families and doctors as simply the effects of old age."

When it opened in October, Duke's Center for the Study of Depression in Later Life, of which Blazer is director, became one of the first National Institute of Mental Health clinics to focus on the study and treatment of depression in the elderly. For further information and referrals, call 919-684-3822.

The center will draw upon the expertise of many specialists in the Department of Psychiatry and at Duke's Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development, according to project coordinator Dr. James Bachar.

"By concentrating on the kind of severe depression that requires hospitalization, we hope to gain insight into milder forms of the disorder as well," Bachar said.

Severe depression is not as common late in life as it is in middle age, but it tends to be more serious because the elderly are much more likely to commit suicide, the Duke psychiatrists said.

"Depression in the elderly is also more likely to be overlooked and more likely to lead to disability," Blazer explained. "A loss of appetite, for example, can cause significant health problems for an older person. The resulting lack of energy may mean they don't get enough energy to maintain muscle tone, which can ultimately be very debilitating."

Blazer said current theory points to biological causes for severe depression. "We don't think it's a

result of life experiences as much as a change in body chemistry," he said.

The Duke center has three major goals. One is to define the symptoms of severe depression in the elderly.

"Very rarely does an older person complain of being depressed," Blazer said. "They tend to describe their symptoms in different terms than a younger person would. They say they're tired, weak or can't sleep. Others may simply attribute this to old age. We need to define the symptoms so that families and doctors can be alert to them."

Another aim of the center is to focus on the biological changes caused by old age and depression. "Some of the biological changes associated with depression may be a natural product of the aging process," Blazer said. "We need to understand what's going on chemically in the brain."

"We will also be studying drug metabolism in the elderly, to determine how well they handle various drugs," he continued.

The third goal of the center is to evaluate treatments to see which are most effective for the elderly.

"We've found that some types of mild electroshock therapy that are very safe can be just as effective for older people as drug treatments, with fewer side effects," Blazer said.

Society Urges Diabetics To Get Regular Eye Exams

Raleigh - If you have diabetes, you should have regular eye checkups, according to the National Society to Prevent Blindness - North Carolina Affiliate. The Society warns that the disease can lead to diabetic retinopathy - a major cause of vision impairment and blindness.

"Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of all new cases of blindness among Americans 20 through 74 years old," says J. T. Church of Henderson, Sight-Saving Chairman of the North Carolina Affiliate. "It is one of several circulatory complications that often affect people who have had diabetes for several years."

Careful control of diabetes and early diagnosis and treatment of retinopathy improves the potential for saving sight, the Society reports. However, if diabetic retinopathy is diagnosed, photocoagulation can be used to arrest the disorder's progress. In this procedure, a strong beam of laser light is used to seal off blood vessels affected by the retinopathy and to stop the growth of abnormal blood vessels.

"If you are diabetic and haven't had your eyes checked recently, this November, which is National

Diabetes Month, may be the time to make that commitment to yourself," Mr. Church adds.

To better acquaint people with the causes, symptoms and treatments of diabetic retinopathy, the Society has published a pamphlet which is available free for single copy requests. Send a self-addressed, stamped, business-sized envelope to: National Society to Prevent Blindness, North Carolina Affiliate, 1033 Wade Ave., Suite 208, Raleigh, N.C. 27605.



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