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## Who needs drugs when exercise will do?

By DR. GIFFORD JONES

Years ago a speaker abruptly broke off his speech. He said, "I know you're bored with this topic, and I'm bored, so let's quit and have a beer."

I felt the same way and nearly tossed this column out. Why bother to waste paper on something you already know? But on the other hand, a report from the Harvard Medical School shows it is absolute madness that so many people are taking pills when two simple changes in lifestyle could prevent and treat some health problems.

We can also learn from what happens to a person who loses an arm.

Today, there's good reason to be concerned about the depressing economic news. But if you're worried about investments, researchers at Harvard say strenuous exercise results in a 50% decrease in depressive symptoms.

This is the exact same amount of relief patients achieve by taking antidepressant medicine or seeking psychotherapy.

Researchers believe that physical activity may boost the growth of brain cells or improve the connections between them. The benefits also include camaraderie while exercising with others and having your brain focused on something other than your problems.

So isn't it worthwhile giving such measures a try before reaching for potentially dangerous drugs?

### GOOD FOR JOINTS

Arthritis is a common malady that plagues many people. Losing weight won't cure the arthritic joint. But studies show that losing just 5.7% of body weight can have a beneficial effect on pain and increase mobility.

In my book, *The Healthy Barmaid*, I describe how exercise helps to pump nutrients into painful joints and ease pain. It could also prevent the need for fewer joint replacements.

Just the addition of a padded heel decreases the force of a foot striking the ground with each step by 50%. For a painful knee, a brace and exercise to strengthen the quadriceps muscle in the upper leg can also relieve the joint of painful pressure.

These measures may not relieve all pain, but they should help to decrease the amount of medication needed.

The first thought that enters the minds of both patients and doctors when hypertension is diagnosed is often a pill. But for mild increases in blood pressure, exercise, weight loss, salt reduction and changes in diet can be effective. Just losing a few pounds can result in a decrease in blood pressure.

Decreasing the amount of saturated fats and sugar helps, too, as well as the addition of whole grains, low fat dairy products, fish, nuts and potassium. An increased amount of calcium, potassium and magnesium is a powerful combination to fight hypertension. A banana provides potassium. A magnesium pill of 500 milligrams twice a day will often relax rigid blood vessels.

Above all, the fact must be accepted that exercise is the prime way to fight the epidemics of obesity and diabetes. I've stressed this point for so many years that you may already be reaching for that beer.

But as a French philosopher once remarked to his students, "All this has been said before, but it must be repeated because no one listened." If people had listened and health authorities taken more action, we would not have the present epidemic of diabetes.

And remember that well-toned muscles are more receptive to insulin that removes excess sugar from the blood stream. Exercise and weight reduction can not only prevent diabetes, but also reverse the need to take insulin.

I see an increasing number of patients who are taking drugs to decrease the effects of osteoporosis (weakened bones). But many cases of this disease can be reduced by regular exercise, calcium and vitamin D.

#### PUMPED-UP LIMB

There's no greater proof that exercise works than the sight of what happens to someone who loses an arm. X-rays several years later show that the bones of the other arm have undergone a major increase in size without any medication! What better proof of exercise do we need?

So there you have it: the choice is a change in lifestyle or the troublesome side effects of drugs. But enough said. Now I wish it were possible to go out and share a beer with all my readers.



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