

Active life reduces stroke risk

Recent research from the US has shown that a healthy lifestyle can reduce stroke risk by about 80 per cent.

Non-smoking women in a healthy weight range who consumed only moderate amounts of alcohol and who exercised regularly displayed a 79 per cent reduced risk of stroke. They also displayed an 81 per cent reduced risk of ischemic stroke, the most common type of stroke which occurs when a blood vessel in the brain is blocked. The rates of risk reduction for men were shown to be 69 per cent overall, and 80 per cent in relation to ischemic stroke.

Study author Stephanie Chiuve, a research associate in the department of nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health, said 'We've previously found that a low-risk lifestyle was very important in preventing coronary heart disease and diabetes, and now we've also found that these healthy habits can lower your risk of stroke'.

Data for the study was taken from the extensive Nurses' Health Study and the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study and involved information on 71,000 women and 44,000 men. In addition to information on smoking status, weight and exercise and drinking habits, data was also collected on diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and the use of medications. Using this information, the researchers compiled a list of five key risk factors, which they defined as: not smoking; drinking a maximum of one glass of alcohol a day for women, and two glasses for men; half an hour of daily physical activity; a healthy diet which includes multivitamins; and a BMI below 25 in middle age.

The researchers noted that each of the factors could influence the risk of stroke, but when combined they reduced the risk of stroke by about 80 per cent. Chiuve said, 'A healthy lifestyle is associated with an 80 per cent lower risk for ischemic stroke compared to people who have none of these lifestyle factors. More than half of ischemic strokes might have been prevented if everyone adhered to these healthy lifestyle factors'.

Source: *Circulation*

Nurses step up to take walking top spot

Nurses came out on top when researchers compared the activity levels of fourteen active occupations. Couriers, garbos, furies, teachers, waiters, secretaries, cleaners, builders, plumbers, posties, judges, solicitors and cops wore pedometers for a day to find out how much they walked during their days work.

Posties came in second at just under over 14,000 strides; waiters third with a little over 9,000 steps; and in fourth were the police with 8,333. Couriers came in fifth with nearly half the amount of steps, admitting they spend more time on their vehicles than their feet, as does the local rubbish collector.

Trailing well behind the pack with most of the day spent desk bound, secretaries sat at 2,500 and coming in last, surprisingly, the builder with only 1,183 steps, advising he spent most of day on his hands and knees.

The goal for steps taken each day should be about 10,000. Research shows that if you accumulate this many steps every day, the chances are that you will be getting many basic benefits of physical activity. If you are trying to lose weight, however, you may need to do more like 12,000 to 15,000 steps a day (Blair, Dunn, Marcus, Carpenter, Jaret, Cooper; *Active Living Every Day – 20 Weeks to Lifelong Vitality*; Human Kenetics 2001).

Amy Smith, managing director of Jenny Craig Australia and New Zealand said, 'There is a vast difference in each profession's physical activity. Not surprisingly, people whose work is largely conducted while sitting behind a desk get little exercise during their day. Given that many people spend a big chunk of their waking hours at work, finding ways to fit in fitness during the workday is increasingly challenging yet an important strategy in the battle of the bulge'.

'Look for opportunities to stay on your feet and move during office hours. Speak rather than email; it's nicer. In other words, walk down the hall and ask the question. Walk to work, get off the train or bus one stop early, avoid lifts or

escalators, opt for stairs or even go for a walk in your lunch break. Wearing a pedometer is an easy way to track your daily steps and is particularly helpful when trying to shed pounds or maintain weight loss. If you wear a pedometer every day for a week, from morning to night and record your daily steps by the end of the week you might be surprised or shocked about how much exercise you do in a day'.

Source: Jenny Craig Australia and New Zealand

Fat deposits raise heart risks

Recent research has found that the level of excess fat deposited around the heart may provide a more accurate picture of heart health than a fatter waist or a high BMI.

A team of researchers from Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Centre studied 159 participants between the ages of 55 and 74, measuring pericardial fat (fat deposits around the heart). Study participants with the highest levels of pericardial fat were found to be 4.65 times more likely to have calcified coronary plaque in their arteries. Although it isn't a risk in itself, calcified coronary plaque is linked to the presence of fatty deposits which can lead to stroke and heart attack.

Lead study author Dr Jingzhong Ding, an assistant professor of gerontology, said, 'Our findings suggest that local fat deposits, rather than total body fat, are most related to calcified coronary plaque. Inflammatory mediators released from pericardial fat may promote inflammation in local coronary arteries and lead to coronary atherosclerosis. Because coronary heart disease kills so many people, it is imperative to find new treatments and prevention strategies' he said.

Source: Obesity

Stretching can benefit ROM says new study

The latest research into the widely debated issue of whether stretching actually benefits range of motion has come out in favour of the pre-exercise activity.

The American College of Sports Medicine study showed that short-duration stretching prior to exercise temporarily improves range of joint motion without weakening muscles.

Researchers studied moderately active, non-athletic participants who were prescribed two, four and eight-minute sessions of lower leg and ankle stretching. Performance was assessed before, immediately after, and 10, 20 and 30 minutes after stretching. Tests showed that this routine had no effect on muscle strength, either positively or negatively, but that it did increase ROM in the ankle joint.

Study author Eric Ryan said, 'In moderately active individuals, short durations of stretching seem to temporarily improve flexibility without the detrimental strength losses that have been previously reported. Pre-competition stretching became controversial due to what has been reported as decreases in performance, however, future research still needs to determine how these stretching exercises may impact athletes'.

Study co-author Joel Cramer added, 'Durations of stretching at or less than eight minutes may not significantly alter lower-leg strength. Our findings, in conjunction with previous studies, suggest that for these muscles, there may be a 'threshold' of stretching between eight and ten minutes that would be necessary to decrease muscle strength'.

Source: *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*

Australian couple complete 8th marathon in 8 countries in 8 weeks

Echoing Forrest Gump's running ability, Australian couple Sue and Andrew O'Brien recently said, 'We're tired. We think we will go home now' after completing their eighth marathon in eight weeks with their finish in the Townsville Marathon. When the O'Briens crossed the line hand in hand in Queensland, the marathon represented the eighth country in which the couple had run a marathon in eight weeks.

'It was wonderful to be running our eighth and final marathon back in our home country and the support from the Townsville community has been fantastic' said a tired and relieved Sue O'Brien. Raising funds to support Oxfam Australia and promoting the benefits of exercising with a partner has been the focus of the O'Briens trip, with Andrew O'Brien suggesting the highlights have included 'Great support and encouragement from each of the communities we have visited and a chance meeting with Nelson Mandela when in South Africa'.

Running eight marathons in eight countries in eight weeks has seen the O'Brien's run 382.4km in organised events. Sue O'Brien said, 'Oxfam Australia is a wonderful and well run organisation and we are proud to play a small role in supporting the work that they do. We ran through some areas in a couple of countries where we saw first-hand the need for an organisation like Oxfam Australia which further enhanced our commitment to raising funds to assist them'.

Combining Sue's background in the fitness industry and Andrew's business background in vision, strategy and relationship management, the O'Briens, both aged in their mid 40s, have battled injury, illness, lack of recovery time, increasing tiredness, language problems and airline schedules to successfully complete the eight marathons in eight weeks. 'We thought we were close when we started out but the challenges of the last two months have taught us some great lessons for our personal and professional lives' said Andrew; 'We hope to spend time in the years ahead continuing to support Oxfam Australia and to use our experience to assist others exercising with a partner to improve their health, fitness and ability to succeed in life'.

'We can't thank people enough for their support' said Sue O'Brien when commenting on the ongoing stream of well wishers and supporters sending messages, following the daily blog of their adventures on www.partnerrunning.com or cheering the couple on each weekend; 'We have been thrilled and humbled by the response and encouraged that so many people have told us they have been inspired by a couple of middle-aged non-elite runners' she said.

Andrew initially took up marathon running as a long term goal to overcome Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Sue, a former Australian triathlon representative and the daughter of Australian Rules football legend Jack Clarke and niece of athletics great Ron Clarke, decided to join Andrew in his long runs. They soon discovered that a two or three hour run without phones, e-mails, television or other distractions was a great way to enjoy each other's company, discuss problems and plan their short and long term futures. 'The more we ran together the stronger and more successful our relationship became and we were amazed by our ability to achieve more in the family, professional, investment and other parts of our lives' said Sue.

Source: www.partnerrunning.com

Music therapy boosts recovery

Recent research findings suggest that music therapy can significantly improve the recovery of patients receiving palliative care.

Study author Lisa Gallagher, a music therapist with the Cleveland Music School Settlement and The Cleveland Clinic's Horvitz Centre for Palliative Medicine, said, 'We've known for a while that music therapy can be used for a wide variety of things in a medical setting. But this particular study clearly shows that it helps improve mood while decreasing pain, anxiety, depression and even shortness of breath among seriously ill patients'.

Between 2000 and 2002, researchers studied 200 patients fighting various types of cancer, noncancerous tumours, sickle cell disease, aortic aneurysm, pain disorders, Gardner's syndrome, AIDS, neurodegenerative conditions and other 'life-limiting' diagnoses.

Aged between 24 and 87 years, 60 per cent of the study subjects were female. The therapy involved Gallagher or a colleague playing musical selections of the patients' choice on keyboards for an average of 25 minutes per session. A comparison of psychological and physical tests conducted both before and after the music therapy sessions showed improvements to patient's anxiety levels, mood, pain levels and even breathlessness. Gallagher said, 'Being a music therapist, I've always believed in the power of the music, but it was great to have it backed up and proven by the research'.

National director of mind-body medicine at the Cancer Treatment Centres of America, Katherine Puckett, commented, 'I've seen music be very comforting, relaxing, healing, calming and helpful with patient pain. It may be hard to put into words, because it's often a visceral reaction that people feel. But music can transport people, because they can really relate to it. So, it can distract from pain. It can even help regulate breathing, as a patient's breath comes in line with the music or tempo of the music. And if that music is tranquil and soothing, it can help quiet them down if they're anxious. So, I have to say that these findings are completely in line with my experience'.

Source: *HealthDay News*

Eggs for brekkie helps weight loss

Recent research from the US has indicated that eating eggs may assist weight loss and increase energy levels in overweight individuals.

A two-month study of overweight and obese adults, led by Nikhil Dhurandhar an associate professor in the laboratory of infection and obesity at Pennington Biomedical Research Centre, Louisiana State University, discovered a positive association between egg consumption and weight loss. Study participants who ate two eggs in the morning, as part of a calorie-reduced diet, lost 65 per cent more weight than their study counterparts who ate bagels for breakfast, and also displayed a 61 per cent greater reduction in body mass index and increased energy levels.

'People have a hard time adhering to diets, and our research shows that choosing eggs for breakfast can dramatically improve the success of a weight loss plan. Apparently, the increased satiety and energy due to eggs helps people better comply with a reduced-calorie diet' said Dhurandhar. The study was funded by the Egg Nutrition Centre.

Source: *International Journal of Obesity*

Soy protein fails to live up to cholesterol-lowering claims

A recent Australian study has found that claims of the ability of soy protein to reduce cholesterol levels may be unfounded.

A team of researchers led by Peter Howe, director of the Nutritional Physiology Research Centre at the Sansom Institute for Health Research at the University of South Australia, studied 58 women and 35 men with an average age of 52 who had 'mildly high' cholesterol levels. Each study participant was placed on three separate diets, each one for six weeks. Differing amounts of soy protein and isoflavones (substances in soy speculated to have cholesterol-lowering powers) were apparent in each of the three diets.

Each study participant's blood cholesterol level (LDL, HDL and triglycerides) was measured both before and after each six-week diet. The researchers found no significant effect on LDL levels from any of the soy protein enhanced diets. The

study was limited, however, by its inclusion of only participants with mildly high cholesterol, and he speculated that those with higher cholesterol levels may notice more significant results. It was also noted that, despite their inability to lower cholesterol, the diets high in soy protein did lower triglycerides, a blood fat, by four per cent.

Alluding to the other health properties of soy foods, such as their high levels of polyunsaturated fats, fibre, vitamins and minerals, Dr Frank Sacks, a professor of nutrition at Harvard School of Public Health, said 'there are other benefits to soy foods. But forget soy protein for lowering LDL'.

Source: *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*

You say 'tomato', I say 'lycopene antioxidant'

Researchers from Ohio State University have developed a processing technique which may boost the antioxidant properties of tomatoes.

Rich in the antioxidant lycopene, a pigment which is believed to help in the prevention of cancer and other chronic diseases, red tomatoes appear to offer an accessible, everyday defence against the disease.

Steven Schwartz, a professor of food science and technology and an investigator in Ohio State University's Comprehensive Cancer Centre noted that in red tomatoes, lycopene's standard structure is linear, which may mean that its absorption through the intestinal walls and into the blood may be inhibited. In the human bloodstream lycopene tends to have a 'bent' structure, prompting researchers to speculate that the body either 'reshapes' lycopene, or is just more likely to absorb 'bent' lycopene molecules into the blood.

Schwartz's team assumed that the body was more likely to absorb already bent molecules, so worked to develop a process to restructure linear molecules into bent ones. The technique they developed involved combining tomatoes with fat and heating them intensely during processing into tomato sauce.

Clinical trials carried out by the team revealed that after eating the specially processed tomato sauce study participants displayed 55 per cent more lycopene in their blood than when they consumed a tomato sauce processed in the regular way.

Noting that processed foods often get criticised for having depleted nutrient levels, Schwartz said, 'Instead, here is a case where processing is positive in terms of enhancing absorption of lycopene'.

Source: *Ohio State University*

World's fittest man, Dean Karnazes, to run 5km with Sydneysiders for the Starlight Children's Foundation

Iconic ultramarathon runner Dean Karnazes will lead Sydneysiders in a 5km Fun Run for charity on Tuesday 14 October. With all proceeds going to the Starlight Foundation, a charity that brightens the lives of seriously ill and hospitalised children and their families, runners from complete novices to elite athletes will get the chance to jog alongside one of the greatest distance runners of all time!

Recently ranked by *Time Magazine* as one of the 'Top 100 Most Influential People in the World', this world-renowned athlete and best-selling author will also speak on his new book *50 Marathons 50 Days: The Secrets to Super Endurance* to be released later this year, and about his recent achievements in the harsh 4 Deserts series.

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In addition to taking out first place in the Atacama Crossing in Chile and fourth place in the Gobi March, China – the first two races in the gruelling four Deserts series across the world's largest and most forbidding deserts, Dean recently conquered 50 marathons in 50 states in 50 consecutive days – the theme for his new book.

A global advocate for exercise, the outdoors and healthy living Dean has inspired many around the world to be the best that they can be. By pushing his mind and body to the absolute limit his message is clear – live life to the fullest.

Just a few of his many accomplishments include: running a 135 mile ultramarathon across Death Valley in 120 degree temperatures; a marathon to the South Pole in negative 40 degrees; swimming across the San Francisco Bay; mountain biking for 24 hours straight; winning the Vermont 100 Mile Endurance Run and the world's toughest footrace: The Badwater Ultramarathon. He was also a recipient of an ESPN ESPY Award for Best Outdoor Athlete in 2006.

When he is not out challenging the elements and pushing his body to super-human levels, he travels the world speaking to schools and community groups about the importance of diet, good health and active living. He is also an accomplished businessman having worked for several Fortune 500 companies.

So, for that next invigorating and inspirational experience, with one of the world's top sporting figures, join Dean and other runners for a dash through Sydney's streets while raising money for an admirable cause.

When: Tuesday 14th October, 2008

Where: Start and Finish Line at The North Face Store, Shop 1, 130 Pitt Street Sydney

Time: Registration 12:00pm; Race start 12:30pm

Dean Karnazes inspirational talk: 2:30pm to 3pm – \$50.00 (all money raised goes to the Starlight Foundation)

To register, visit www.thenorthface.com.au/funrun - limited places available so get in quick!

Source: True Alliance