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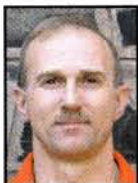


Truth or Consequences

Prescription for a healthy heart

■ BY MATT BRZYCKI

For many years, aerobic training has been the one activity that's emphasized the most in a prescription for a healthy heart. But another physical activity that's receiving greater attention and endorsement is strength training (aka "resistance training" and "weight training").



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BENEFITS OF STRENGTH TRAINING

The American Heart Association has made note of a number of factors that contribute to the risk of coronary artery disease (CAD) and heart attack. Some of these cannot be modified such as age, gender and heredity. If your relatives suffered from CAD or heart attacks, for example, you have a greater risk of having those same maladies. And needless to say, you cannot change your ancestry.

On the other hand, many risk factors can be modified. They include diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, overweight/obesity, physical inactivity and smoking. The primary way to change these risk factors is through modifications in behavior and/or lifestyle.

Strength training can influence some of the risk factors that you can control. Here's a glimpse at how this is accomplished.

Diabetes

A growing problem in the United States is diabetes. The insidious nature of diabetes isn't necessarily in the condition itself but in the diseases that are associated with it such as CAD, obesity and stroke.

There's scientific support that strength training is an effective tool in the management of diabetes. Exercise, in general, is said to have an "insulin-like effect" on blood glucose. The value of strength training is that it engages a large amount of muscle mass and increases the uptake of glucose by the exercising muscles.

High Blood Pressure

Also known as "hypertension," high blood pressure is defined as a systolic



pressure of 140 mm Hg or more or a diastolic pressure of 90 mm Hg or more. Studies have shown that physical activity can reduce resting blood pressure. Improvements in blood pressure are most evident from aerobic training but will be even more significant with the addition of strength training.

Overweight/Obesity

An estimated 66 percent of Americans are either overweight or obese. People gain weight when their caloric consumption (eating) is greater than their caloric expenditure (exercising).

Like all types of physical training, strength training produces an expenditure of calories. Strength training is unique, though, in that it can decrease fat mass and increase muscle mass, thereby improving body composition and enhancing appearance. Muscle tissue is more metabolically active than adipose (fat) tissue, meaning that it requires more calories to function. As a result, you'll be more efficient at using calories.

Physical Inactivity

By most accounts, the majority of people fail to achieve the recommended levels of physical activity. Indeed, statistics show that less than half of the adults in America met the minimum guidelines as set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American College of Sports Medicine.

Many conditions are linked to physical inactivity including CAD, hypertension, obesity and osteoporosis. Strength train-

ing is another way to combat a sedentary lifestyle.

Other Advantages

Besides the aforementioned contributions in modifying behavior and lifestyle, strength training offers several other important benefits.

For one thing, you can increase your strength which helps you improve musculoskeletal function thereby enabling you to do police work and leisure pursuits with less effort. In addition, strength training can increase your bone mineral density which assists you in the prevention and management of osteoporosis. Having greater strength also helps you reduce the frequency and severity of any injuries that might occur in the preparation for or the performance of your job as a police officer. Finally, strength training can improve your confidence and self esteem; simply put, you'll feel better about yourself.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Aerobic training has long been a staple of a prescription to promote a healthy heart. Clearly, though, strength training offers a multitude of unique benefits that have an additive effect and, thus, is a vital partner of aerobic training. ♥

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