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• GROUP CYCLING • CREATING A MISSION STATEMENT • OSHA COMPLIANCE

Q&A

[BY MATT BRZYCKI]

Can people really improve their health and fitness by gardening?

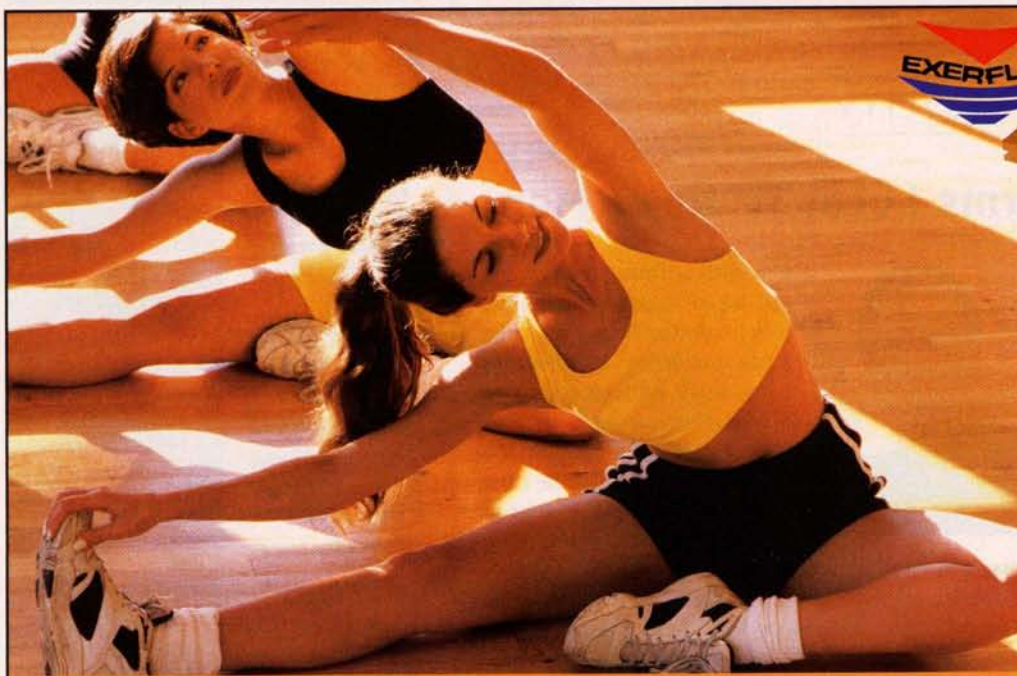
The origin of this notion can be traced back to 1996 with the publication of *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. The substance of the report was grossly misinterpreted. In raw essence, its main message was to get inactive Americans active on a regular basis. The report offered numerous examples of how to obtain a "moderate amount of activity." (It loosely characterized a "moderate amount of physical activity" as that which uses about 150 calories per day or 1,000 calories per week.)

Among the examples given were non-traditional activities such as gardening for 30 to 45 minutes, and raking leaves for 30 minutes. Also included were traditional activities such as bicycling 5 miles in 30 minutes and



running 1.5 miles in 15 minutes. But many individuals — including members of the media — chose to overstate the non-traditional activities and overlook the traditional ones. So, the general public read and heard that gardening for 30 minutes could improve their health and fitness, and surely took to planting vegetables in their backyards, thinking that this would solve a multitude of ills ranging from obesity to osteoporosis.

Be that as it may, several points must be understood about the report. First, the recommendations in the report were meant primarily for inactive individuals, not active ones. Second, the report didn't suggest that everyone should garden several times a week for 30 minutes on a regular basis. Rather, gar-



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dening was just one of many options that were given. Third, activities such as gardening and raking leaves certainly can produce a desirable expenditure of calories and improve health. But it's unlikely that they would be of sufficient demands on the heart and circulatory system to produce any cardiovascular benefits and improve fitness. **FM**

Do artificial sweeteners have any effect on blood glucose?

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved five low-calorie sweeteners: acesulfame potassium, aspartame, neotame, saccharine and sucralose. Although these products are far sweeter than sugar — neotame is as much as 13,000 times sweeter — they have little or no calories and no carbohydrates. Since they don't have any carbohydrates, they don't have much of an impact on blood glucose.

Before being used in the United States, artificial sweeteners must get the stamp of approval from the FDA as being safe. Despite endorsement by the FDA, the safety of artificial sweeteners has been a point of contention for years. While artificial sweeteners have a minimal effect on blood glucose, their long-term effects on health are unknown. **FM**

Do different stepping rates on a stairclimber have different effects on different muscles?

One study compared the electromyographic (EMG) activity of the gluteus maximus, quadriceps (the rectus femoris and vastus medialis), hamstrings (semimembranosus and semitendinosus) and gas-

trocnemius at three different rates of stepping (35, 60 and 95 steps per minute). They found that, as the speed of stepping increased, so did the EMG activity of all muscles except for the hamstrings. (It should be noted that the subjects only used the handrails for balance, not support. In addition, they took the same 8-inch step at all rates of stepping.)

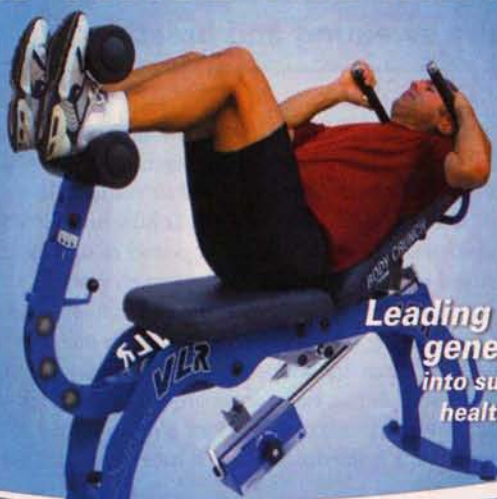
It would appear, then, that faster rates of stepping are more desirable, since this activates more muscle tissue. But here's something to consider: When participants increase their stepping speeds, they often reduce their range of motion. In other words, they take shorter steps. Also, the subjects in the study stated that 95 steps per minute provided the best lower extremity and cardiovascular workout, but that 60 steps per minute gave them a better sense of control and felt more natural. **FM**



Do you have questions that you need answered? Email them to edit@fitnessmgmt.com.

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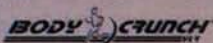
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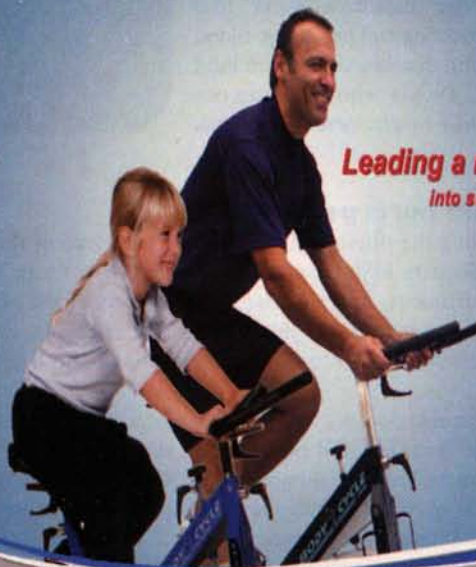
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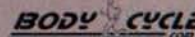


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