

Death by Lack of Exercise

Sedentary Death Syndrome Strikes 1 in 10 Americans

BY **CONNIE ROETHEL**, for *SBT*

This may sound shocking but remember when the early warnings of tobacco usage were considered farfetched? The organization that identified and named Sedentary Death Syndrome, Researchers for Inactivity-related Disorders (RID), faces the same hurdles and challenges in their efforts to educate the public about the dangers of physical inactivity. Just as tobacco kills, so does an inactive lifestyle.

The level of physical activity of Americans today is appalling; and recent results from employer sponsored Health Risk Appraisals (HRAs) show no significant changes in exercise trends. An HRA, a confidential health survey used to provide individual and aggregate health risk data, measures medical markers like cholesterol, triglycerides, weight, and body fat percent. The employer then uses the information to determine future wellness programming. Recent HRA results show we are making progress in changing people's eating habits, as evidenced by improvements in cholesterol and triglyceride levels. However, we are not seeing significant changes in weight, body fat percent or body mass index measurements. The conclusion... people are not exercising. It's easier for people to make changes in their diet and eating habits than to incorporate exercise into their daily routines.

The cost of inactivity

Studies show that seven out of 10 American adults don't exercise regularly despite the proven health benefits. Experts say lack of physical activity contributes to some 300,000 deaths each year in the United States caused by heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other conditions. However, lack of exercise is not just something that affects the individual. Obesity, which is closely linked to physical inactivity, costs the United States \$117 billion per year. Heart Healthy Waukesha County, a local collaborative on workplace wellness, estimated that physical inactivity costs Waukesha county businesses an estimated \$377 million dollars annually.

What are the barriers?

"Knowledge is not necessarily power," says Karin Peterson, Certified Health and Fitness Specialist, Personal Trainer and Wellness Coach. "Most people

will tell you that eating right and exercise are important parts of a healthy lifestyle. But most people will also tell you that they practice neither." Peterson believes that emotion, not information, drives lifestyle choices. "As long as health and fitness professionals continue to beat people over the head with the exercise bat, we will see very little progress. Most active people do not cite health benefits as the reason they exercise—they do it because it makes them feel good. We need to meet people where they are at, physically, emotionally, and intellectually, and explore all the barriers that keep them stuck in current lifestyle choices."

Making a plan

Before the age of automobiles, television and advanced technology, Americans had to physically move to get places, be entertained or accomplish work. Today, we have to actually make a plan to move and get physical activity. Surveys of the American

public have revealed a lot of excuses for not exercising.

- 1. Lack of time.** Many people think they can't find time in their busy schedules to exercise. Think about the amount of time you spend watching TV. Schedule your exercise time. If you can't find a full 30 minutes during your day, break it up into 10 or 15 minute segments.
- 2. Fatigue.** We all get tired from our jobs and other activities of the day. If you exercise regularly, you will have more energy and feel less tired all the time. You'll have energy for the things you like to do as well as for the things you have to do.
- 3. Perception about adequate exercise.** Some people who don't exercise regularly feel they get enough exercise in their daily jobs and routines. But most jobs, including housework, do not provide enough exercise to keep the body fit.
- 4. Difficulty getting started.** "I'll start tomorrow but tomorrow never comes. You don't have to change your life overnight. Start with small goals. Decide you'll get up 10 minutes early to walk or lift weights. Over time, you can increase your workout routine. For now, just worry about making exercise a daily habit."

5. Fear of pain. Exercise should not be painful; if you feel sore you are working too hard; start gradually and slowly work up to your desired fitness level.

6. Dislike of exercise. Do what you enjoy. If you hate running, you don't have to do it. Find activities that match your personality. If you love the outdoors, go hiking or biking.

7. Difficulty staying motivated. You've tried to exercise but you keep quitting. People often quit because they schedule too many workouts, work too hard and/or don't give themselves rest days. If you are getting

bored change your routine every 4 to 6 weeks.

8. Can't afford a gym membership. You don't have to join a gym to exercise. You can walk anytime, anywhere. Exercise balls, workout videos, and dumbbells are cheap and can be used for a variety of exercises.

9. Changes in weight and shape take too long.

You don't put weight on overnight and it won't come off overnight. Give your body time to react. It could take up to 12 weeks before you start seeing some real changes. In the meantime, try to enjoy the other benefits of exercise.

10. Taking time away

from family. You don't have to neglect your family to fit in exercise. Take family walks or bike rides. Play catch in the back yard. Show your family the importance of physical activity by being a good role model.



Connie Roethel, RN, MSH, is president of Complementary Health & Healing Partners (CHHP), a corporate well-

ness and health promotion services company with offices in Mequon. She can be reached at (262) 241-9947.