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# Health & Nutrition Letter

YOUR GUIDE TO LIVING  
HEALTHIER LONGER

## NEWSBITES

### Vitamin D Pills No Help Against Colds and Flu

Don't count on extra vitamin D to get you through cold and flu season snuffle-free. Results from a large new clinical trial show no significant difference in upper respiratory tract infections between people randomly assigned to vitamin D supplements and those getting a placebo. The study, published in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, also found no benefit from calcium supplements, either in duration of infection or severity of symptoms. The 759 generally healthy participants, ages 45-75, received either 1,000 IU of vitamin D, 1,200 milligrams of calcium, vitamin D plus calcium, or a placebo daily. Their days of illness and symptom severity were tracked over four winters.

Although some prior observational studies have suggested a benefit for vitamin D against upper respiratory tract infections, researchers pointed out

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## Active Leisure Improves Heart Health and Longevity

*Getting moving in everyday activities boosts health regardless of exercise habits.*

How you spend your free time may affect how much life time you have to spend. While nothing beats regular exercise, a new Swedish study reports that older adults who are more active in their leisure time were less prone to cardiovascular problems and lived longer than their sedentary peers. The benefits were seen regardless of whether the seniors also engaged in vigorous exercise.

"Every time you move around rather than sit, you challenge your heart to beat a little faster, training it to be stronger and fitter," explains Miriam E. Nelson, PhD, a professor in Tufts' Friedman School and author of the "Strong Woman" series of books. "That is, the more you push your heart and the rest of your cardiovascular system to do, the more they can do."



Active leisure pursuits such as gardening can reduce heart and mortality risk. (Image © Thinkstock)

**ACTIVE VS. SEDENTARY:** In the new study, Elin Ekblom-Bak, PhD, of the Karolinska University Hospital in Stockholm, and colleagues followed 3,839 men and women who were about 60 years old when the research began. They were given a physical exam and answered 24 questions to assess their types and levels of physical and sedentary activities.

Over the next 12.5 years, 383 of the participants died from all causes and 476

### WHAT'S YOUR "FITNESS AGE"?

Another Scandinavian study reports that there's a low-tech method for assessing your aerobic fitness and estimating your "fitness age." Norwegian researchers evaluated almost 5,000 people, ages 20 to 90, to figure out how to estimate peak oxygen intake (VO2 max) without a treadmill test. Five measurements, plugged into a simple formula, reliably predicted VO2 max, which has been shown to indicate "fitness age." A 50-year-old with the peak oxygen uptake of a 70-year-old, for example, would have a fitness age of 70.

To estimate your fitness age, you'll need to determine your resting heart rate by taking your pulse (beats per minute) after sitting quietly for 10 minutes. Plug that number, your waist measurement, age, gender and frequency and intensity of exercise into the online calculator at <[www.worldfitness-level.org](http://www.worldfitness-level.org)>.

suffered a fatal or nonfatal first-time cardiovascular event. As might be expected, those who regularly engaged in moderate-to-vigorous exercise had a higher probability of survival than sedentary participants. But so did those reporting a high level of non-exercise physical activity.

Compared to people spending their leisure time in sedentary ways, those in the "active leisure" group were at 30% lower risk for all-cause mortality and 27% less likely to suffer a first-time cardiovascular event. That healthy edge remained even after deaths and cardiovascular events from the first three years of the study were excluded.

Active-leisure seniors were also metabolically healthier. Both men and women

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# Protecting Your Heart Also Better for Your Bones

Research finds heart-smart diet and lifestyle boosts bone health.

**Y**ou might not think that eating smart for your heart would have anything to do with also protecting your bones. But a new study finds that following the American Heart Association's diet and lifestyle recommendations is also associated with better bone health.

"For many years, nutrition and bone research focused mainly on calcium and vitamin D," says senior author Katherine L. Tucker, PhD, a professor at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell and adjunct professor at Tufts' Friedman School. "We are now learning that many foods and nutrients affect bone mineral density and fracture risk. Fortunately, these overlap substantially with those that protect against heart disease."

**HEART-SMART SCORE:** Noting that cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis share common mechanisms in the body, Tucker and colleagues sought to test whether what was good for one might also be effective in preventing the other. They developed a score based on adherence to the 2006 American Heart Association Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations. (To read about the latest update to those recommendations, see this issue's Special Report.) They then applied that measure to 933 Puerto Ricans, ages 47 to 79, who

were also tested for bone mineral density.

The results showed a clear link between heart-healthy living and bone health. For every five-point increase in the adherence score, the odds for osteoporosis or osteopenia in the hip dropped 17%. Risk in other bone areas dropped from 9% to 14% with each incremental increase in the adherence score. The findings were published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

**SIMILAR STEPS:** Taking a closer look at recommendations for avoiding heart disease and preventing osteoporosis, it's perhaps not so surprising that similar diet and lifestyle choices might benefit both. The 2006 Heart Association guidelines, used to formulate the study's adherence score, include:

- ◆ Balance caloric intake and physical activity to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.
- ◆ Consume a diet rich in vegetables and fruits.
- ◆ Choose whole-grain, high-fiber foods.
- ◆ Consume fish, especially oily fish, at least twice a week.
- ◆ Limit intake of saturated fat, trans fat and dietary cholesterol.
- ◆ Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt.
- ◆ If you consume alcohol, do so in moderation.

The guidelines also recommend engaging in regular physical activity and avoiding smoking.

Similarly, the National Osteoporosis

## TAKE CHARGE!

The National Osteoporosis Foundation recommends these foods for bone health, because they are good sources of key nutrients:

- ◆ Dairy products such as low-fat and non-fat milk, yogurt and cheese—calcium, some fortified with vitamin D.
- ◆ Canned sardines and salmon (with bones)—calcium.
- ◆ Fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, tuna and sardines—vitamin D.
- ◆ Collard greens, turnip greens, kale, okra, Chinese cabbage, dandelion greens, mustard greens and broccoli—calcium.
- ◆ Spinach, beet greens, okra, tomato products, artichokes, plantains, potatoes, sweet potatoes, collard greens and raisins—magnesium.
- ◆ Tomato products, raisins, potatoes, spinach, sweet potatoes, papaya, oranges, orange juice, bananas, plantains and prunes—potassium.
- ◆ Red peppers, green peppers, oranges, grapefruits, broccoli, strawberries, brussels sprouts, papaya and pineapples—vitamin C.
- ◆ Dark green leafy vegetables such as kale, collard greens, spinach, mustard greens, turnip greens and brussels sprouts—vitamin K.
- ◆ Foods fortified with calcium and vitamin D, such as certain brands of juices, breakfast foods, soy milk, rice milk, cereals, snacks and breads.

Foundation <nof.org> suggests these steps to help protect your bones:

- ◆ Get enough calcium and vitamin D and eat a well-balanced diet.
- ◆ Engage in regular exercise.
- ◆ Eat foods that are good for bone health, such as fruits and vegetables.
- ◆ Avoid smoking and limit alcohol to two to three drinks per day.

**ACTIVE LEISURE** *continued from page 1*  
who were active in their free time tended to have a smaller waist circumference, higher "good" HDL cholesterol levels and lower triglycerides. Among men, active leisure was further associated with better insulin and blood-sugar levels. Active leisure was not linked to lower blood pressure, however.

**SIT LESS, LIVE MORE:** Reporting their findings in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, Ekblom-Bak and colleagues concluded, "A generally active daily life had important beneficial associations

with cardiovascular health and longevity in older adults, which seemed to be regardless of regular exercise habits.... For future health, promoting everyday non-exercise physical activity might be as important as recommending regular exercise for older adults."

The researchers speculated that spending your spare time sitting rather than moving around might cause the body to release fewer molecules called myokines, which in turn play a role in endocrine function.

The findings provide further incentive to get up and get moving. Tufts'

Nelson says. "We're talking about things you've heard a lot about but that few people actually do: taking the stairs instead of the elevator; not driving around the supermarket parking lot to find the space closest to the door but parking instead wherever you first see a space; walking rather than driving to destinations you can reach on foot within 10 minutes (which will ensure walking a mile there and back); getting up to turn the television on and off manually rather than using the remote; and so on.

"It may not seem like it adds up to much," Nelson adds, "but it does."