



FitHapp \equiv ns

How to Beat the Cold

It's been a long, cold, snowy winter, somewhat gray and definitely inspiring....to get out of town. But where to go? Even Florida is cold. Fortunately, there is one warm place you always carry around with you: your body. Yes, as 'homeotherms' – a term I made up to mean creatures that maintain their body temperature within small bounds – we have the capacity to raise our body temperatures when we get cold – shivering; and cool them off when we get hot – sweating. But we also have something else that warms us up that's way more comfortable and even beneficial: moving.

Trying to find the silver lining beneath these darkened skies, I am always looking for ways to stimulate and motivate movement. Obviously clients who go into a gym will move more than those who don't. But don't feel you have to go to the gym to do so. Studies show that getting up and moving about after having sat for a (short) while can, over time, yield improvements in cardiovascular risk factors, waist line girth, and even skeletal integrity. (I met a new chiropractor in the neighborhood who shared the research he's read that says you need to stand up every 30 minutes or else you start creating skeletal and ligamentous 'creep' – the process by which things start to decline in small increments.) In fact, it really does not take much to get some of these benefits. One study I read suggested simply walking down the hall at work to get a cup of coffee or water. (Of course, if you're hitting the soda machine or buying snacks from the vending machine, all bets are off.) People who do so more frequently, if they don't neglect their work, tend to have lower blood pressure, cholesterol, and even blood sugar levels. And smaller waists!

Now, that's all in comparison to people who *don't* get up frequently, right? WRONG! Other studies have shown that people who go to the gym and work out hard for an hour, but then sit for extended periods of time at work or leisure, do not, on average, have better vitals than those who get up more frequently. And if you've ever suffered low back pain and seen a professional for it, you know you're not supposed to sit all 60 of the minutes of an hour; you should get up and move about at least 5 minutes per hour.

Another option, one that I've implemented right here in my office, is to convert your work station into a vertical – standing – one. I had my old desk covered up with stained wood panels and elevated so that I could work at the computer while standing. Originally done after I tweaked my hip – my good one – and sitting hurt more than standing, after reading about sedentariness, and feeling rather monitor-bound whenever I'd sit at the computer, I made the switch. What I've discovered is, not only do I shift my weight from leg to leg, but I can't stay at the desk quite as long, so I move about. It actually reduces screen time while helping keep me healthy. Might try this with the kids, too.

Will you get buff with such little activity? I think not. Will you avoid a heart attack with such little activity? Who am I to say? But you will be warmer and healthier overall with such activity. Sure beats taking the cold sitting down.....




The U.S. Push to EAT LESS


A recent article in the NY Times, and likely even in the Wall Street Journal to be fair and balanced, indicated that the federal government's effort to battle the bulge has taken a turn to the simplistic: eat less. Granted, all great weight loss books follow this and one other dictum: exercise more, despite the many other pages of pseudo-scientific rationalization as to why Americans and many others around the world are getting fatter. Furthermore, these books, designed to make money rather than help people really get a grip on their weight control issues (for those are more complex than any publisher would allow an author to get into for lack of sufficient ink), add insult to injury once they start their prescriptive rationalizations. That is, once they start describing their diet plans, they lose credibility. Not because any of these diets fail to help people lose weight; they all do. And not because they fail to help people keep weight off; they all do, if you follow them *in perpetuity*. Rather, they lose credibility because they attempt to convince you that somehow you and others like you defy all the laws of physics: you gain weight and somehow or another seem to do so without eating too much. Hmmmmm....


First of all, it's not about weight. You've read it here and elsewhere, so I won't belabor the point. It's not even about body composition. Sure, Eddie George had a high BMI – but he was all muscle. How many of us can or will live so Spartan as to achieve his data points? How many should? These issues of dimensions and measurable factum are really beside the point. My issue, as I presented at an Evening Class program at USN, is that we are, like it or not, *physic*-al creatures, subject to the same laws Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein (ever notice how great minds often start with vowels: Isaac, Albert, Ir...never mind) described. So, when it is about weight or body comp, let's be real and admit that we're no different than other critters: if we eat too many calories, regardless of whether they are fats, carbs, some magic potion, unless we are using them for growth (like young kids) or activity (like young kids should, as should all of us), we will get fatter.

So, where am I going with this and the US government's push to get folks to eat less? Messaging is hard, especially when the government is going up against lifestyles and corporate interests. The latter impact the former more than government by any means, even education. Without the food industry taking a role in the fight against obesity, government will never be able to convince people to really alter their lifestyles toward healthier patterns. Likewise, fitness professionals will never convince the public, let alone our own private clients, of the necessity to alter lifestyles toward health, by message alone. But studies do show that it's easier to lose excess weight by eating less than it is by exercising more; that exercising more is necessary for keeping excess weight from creeping up; and that diet and exercise, **IN MODERATION**, does not hurt nearly as much as it helps. In light of the fact that the military, this past decade, has had to refuse service from some 25% of applicants due to physical unreadiness or ill health, the message must be supported by all - regardless of political affiliation.

Morsels of Muscle

If you have to leap over tall buildings, once, or stop a speeding freight train, once, try PAP: post-activation potentiation. This is a neurological mechanism whereby the muscles get primed to do an explosive movement, once, by performing a very high intensity contraction. One study (JSCR Jan. 2011) found that, if you do the contraction 1-3 minutes before the explosive leg movement, you will be stronger during that move. If you wait too long, or don't allow enough rest after the contraction, you won't get any boost in power. In the same journal, another study found that only a strong isometric contraction of the upper body muscles will improve subsequent performance of a similar upper body movement. Traditional dynamic, up-and-down, exercise won't yield such favorable results. Now you know how Superman actually did what he did. 

What if you did want to do very high intensity cardio sprints because they are sooooo good for you, even if they are miserable to do? What's the best way to do the recovery between said sprints? A recent study (JSCR Jan. 2011) found in a comparison of active recovery (moving around), passive recovery (sitting still), or dynamic stretching (moving limbs through their fullest range of motion), that the stretching allowed for greater lactate removal and subsequent performance. Next would be active recovery. But, by all means, don't sit down! Not only does it reduce subsequent performance but it could precipitate a cardiac event. And that's not good. 

A recent MSSE article compiled the data from several studies on resistance training (RT) and lean body mass (LBM) in aging adults. The results are clearly supportive of RT so far as maintaining LBM, though admittedly not for building great amounts of muscle mass. In fact, most show that, on average, a 3-6 month program may add slightly more than 1 Kg (2.2#) of mass, but that most lose about 0.2 Kg/yr after 50. Recommendations comport with current ACSM recommendations of 8-12 reps, 1-2 sets, 2-3 times per wk of RT, especially as we age. If you're reading this, you are aging. 

A Sad Farewell

To every season, turn, turn, turn....A phrase from the Bible popularized in song back in the hippie era, suggesting that things happen cyclically. Life itself is one of those that constantly cycles: friends are made, and friends will pass.

Welling Lagrone, a friend to all who've ever met him, passed away last month from a massive cerebral hemorrhage. I met him over 18 years ago when he started training at STEPS, and learned more from him than I'm sure he learned from me, though appearances should not define what each learned from the other. We helped each other through some hard times and remained honest and open about our respective lives even as we cajoled each other here at the gym about all matters – including politics.

Fond memories will remain forever in my mind's eye when I think of Welling – watching him dancing a ballet with my then 3-yr old Lydia after her dance class, shadow smiles of his witticisms: he always threatened me saying he'd tell people where he trained if I didn't treat him right. Sure, he was the best dressed man in Nashville, and never failed to brighten the black-and-gray décor at STEPS upon his arrival. But once in workout garb, he was just like the rest of us, maybe more so. What he did for the arts in Nashville should never be forgotten. Or, as some have said about him the week of his service, he lived life large. Farewell, old friend.

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STEPS Fitness Menu

Solo Training: Traditional one-hour sessions of cardio, strength, stability, and flexibility. **12 sessions..... \$765**

Solo + Power Plate Training: one-hour sessions that incorporate Whole Body Vibration and other technologies to enhance bone density, muscle strength, power, agility, and balance. **12 sessions..... \$825**

Half Time: Utilizing our equipment, you take care of the cardio for 30-45 minutes, and work with your trainer for 30 minutes on strength, stability, and flexibility. **15 sessions..... \$700**

Duet: You and a friend for one hour with your trainer. **12 sessions..... \$940**

Biometrics: A successful program for long-term weight management balancing healthy eating with strength training. The 6-week program includes initial assessment, menu plan, 19 training sessions, and 2 month cardio membership. **\$1300**

* Initial consultation required for all new clients (\$100)