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### A little exercise goes a long way

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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Jan. 28, 1998

**Contact:** Gordon Opel, wellness director, (406) 243-2027.

### **A LITTLE EXERCISE GOES A LONG WAY**

#### **MISSOULA--**

If you're one of those people who wonder just how little exercise they can squeak by with and still be healthy, here's the answer. Fairly little.

All it takes is 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity five or six days a week, says Gordon Opel, wellness director for The University of Montana-Missoula and Missoula's St. Patrick Hospital.

What's more, he says, it doesn't have to come in one 30-minute bout. It's fine to accumulate your time in, say, two 15-minute or three 10-minute walks of moderate intensity.

"People should exercise about 1,050-2,000 calories worth in a week to be healthy," Opel says. More than that provides no extra health benefits, he says.

So how do you measure calories of exercise? Opel says walking one mile burns about 100-150 calories. Walking 1.5 miles at a brisk pace five days a week will put you into the desired range of caloric output, he says.

But you can count other activities, too -- like housework, gardening, a bike ride. And if you do something more intense -- like swimming or cross-country skiing -- so much the better. The bottom line is 30 minutes a day most days of the week.

Now that's a good deal, Opel says, especially when you consider the health benefits -- reduced risk of heart disease and certain cancers, lowered total cholesterol, more energy and stamina, reduced stress and stronger bones. The list goes on.

-more-



## Exercise.rl--2

It includes increased longevity, the item with the really good news for couch potatoes. If people who don't exercise -- that's about 25 percent of American adults -- begin getting a little exercise, they reduce their risk of premature death dramatically, Opel says.

He takes his information from a study reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association and written up in The New York Times. In the study, men and women were divided into five groups ranging from group one, people who were sedentary, to group five, those who were most active. Premature-death rates dropped most for men and women who went from group one to group two in their activity levels. For men, the rates dropped from 64.0 to 25.5 deaths per 10,000 person years of follow-up. For women, the rates dropped from 39.5 to 20.5.

Groups three, four and five showed relatively little change in mortality rates. In other words, walking 30 minutes a day, which was the activity level of group two, reduced the risk of premature death almost as much as running 30-40 miles a week, the activity level of the extremely fit people in group five.

Bear in mind that health and fitness are not the same thing, and what Opel argues is that health does not require the agonizing amounts of hard exercise that fitness requires. Naturally, by taking a 30-minute walk each day you won't be as fit as an Olympic athlete. On the other hand, chances are pretty good that you'll live about as long.

Maybe you aren't interested in longevity? You think old age is nothing more than a painful and lonely decrepitude spent in a nursing home? It doesn't have to be. And your odds are a lot better it won't be, Opel says, if you get off the couch and get moving -- just 30 minutes a day, most days.

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