

Traditional aerobic fitness the way to go

September 14 2010, By Jane Hurly

What to do: walk around the block or work up a sweat in an aerobic workout at the gym? If you're looking for the best health benefits from an exercise program, University of Alberta researchers have found a traditional aerobic fitness program that gets your heart pumping beats a walking program hands down. But if you want to get moving, a walking program is easier to do, it's good for you, and you're more likely to stick with it.

Researchers compared fitness training to a pedometer-based walking program, measuring the fitness and health outcomes of each. Programs were designed so participants would expend the same amount of energy in each regimen.

For the six-month study, exercise physiologist Gordon Bell recruited 128 physically inactive men and women between 27 and 65 years of age with no known cardiovascular or other diseases. At the start of the study, volunteers were randomized into the control group, the walking group or the exercise group and all were required to wear a pedometer for the duration of the study to ensure that they stayed within the prescribed number of steps.

Comparing fitness and walking groups, Bell and his team found that after six months those in the supervised fitness program showed significantly greater reductions in their [systolic blood pressure](#) (about nine per cent versus three per cent); rating of perceived exertion, or effort measured during submaximal exercise (10 per cent versus no change); ventilatory threshold—the point at which respiratory changes

occur and respiration begins to become increasingly difficult during progressive exercise (15 per cent versus four per cent); and peak VO₂, a measurement of peak oxygen intake (nine per cent versus three per cent).

All told, Bell says all participants saw benefits. Walking and fitness training groups saw a significant reduction in body mass, [waist circumference](#) and waist-to-hip ratio after the six months, as well as resting heart rate. Surprisingly, the control group saw changes too and Bell says it's possible they were motivated to be more physically active after undergoing the health assessment at the start of the study, and having a pedometer, which may have made them more aware of how much or little they were physically active.

“The participants in the traditional fitness program improved their fitness-based response more than those in the walking program,” says Bell. “The magnitude of that difference in improvement was very clear.”

However, he says, it's not the type of exercise program for everyone. “Not everybody's going to be able to start in a traditional exercise program, such as those with certain health issues or type 2 diabetes, because of the higher intensity, duration and frequency of exercise training that is required.”

“Lifestyle and pedometer-based fitness programs make it easier to get started, as long as there are no lower limb issues or one is not severely overweight. Most people have the ability to walk and walking-based programs are easy to prescribe and progressively overload, and get people walking far enough to begin to derive health benefits from it.”

But, cautions Bell, “It's a long-term commitment. It seems that you need at least six months to get some health benefits from walking-based programs.”

More information: The study was published in the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health* and is part of the larger research study led by the principal investigator and exercise psychologist, Wendy Rodgers and colleagues Vicki Harber, Terra Murray and Kerry Courneya, examining how people felt about exercise and their reasons for adherence or non-adherence to an exercise program.

Provided by University of Alberta

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