



## Upper Arlington Preventative Primary Care

### Exercise Snacks: How Shorter Bouts Equal Longer Lives

*Steven T. Devor, Ph.D., FACSM*

*Exercise Physiology, Upper Arlington Preventative Primary Care*

Over the past several years we have learned that when it comes to disease risk reduction – for example, lowering your risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity – short bouts of exercise are highly effective. That is if the short bouts of activity add up to the recommended amount of total daily exercise: approximately 30 minutes every day of light aerobic activity.

According to the research these short bouts of exercise need only be 10 minutes in length if they are accumulated over the course of the day. For example, you may go for three 10 minute walks per day, once in the morning, one after you have lunch, and then a final walk following dinner – 30 accumulated minutes of exercise.

An interesting parallel to the research on accumulated short bouts of exercise indicates clearly the more overall time people spend being sedentary the greater their health risks are. This is true even for regular gym-goers who might spend as much as 90 minutes every morning sweating it out. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for those same regular gym-goers to then be very sedentary the remainder of their day. This category of individuals has been called “active couch potatoes” by scientists that study physical activity and health risks.

However, the very latest investigations into the benefits of physical activity on health has sought to combine these two research areas and has revealed positive results.

We now understand that simple, routine, very short (as little as a minute or two) efforts of activity can be as just as beneficial as longer workouts from a disease risk reduction standpoint. For example, parking at the back of the lot, taking the stairs as opposed to the elevator, or pacing back and forth while talking on the phone. These very short bouts of activity – “exercise snacks” - when done several times over the course of your day provide significant benefits as they breaks up long periods of inactivity.

Sitting is indeed the new smoking, and these short “exercise snacks”, as I call them, effectively combat all the sitting and inactivity that has proven to be so bad for our overall health.

In one of the studies, which was a part of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, approximately 5,000 people – all over 40 years of age – had to wear a physical activity monitor for a week. The scientists then correlated their daily activity levels with death rates over a period of seven years. What they were interested in was the influence of physical activity bouts of 10 minutes, 5 minutes, or of any length duration – for example taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

The results were clear and very encouraging. Regardless of the length of activity time, individuals that *accumulated* better than average *total* daily amounts of activity had lower rates of death when compared with those who were less active. Said another way, regardless of how the activity was accumulated – longer bouts or more sporadic very short bouts (“exercise snacks”) – the results were the same.

For many people that may not be ready to commit to a more formal and structured exercise session every day this news is highly welcomed. The “exercise snack” approach is easy to incorporate into your lifestyle, and for many is a more natural – and easy - way to accumulate the daily recommended minutes of physical activity. Simply accumulate more lifestyle physical activity by moving around more throughout your day. Many people find this sort of exercise regimen much easier to maintain and fit into their lives.

Bottom line, the minutes you spend moving and being physically active are keys to overall health, and need to be accumulated every day. All activity counts and some is far better than none. So get up, take a short walk, take the steps, park at the back of the lot. Movement is medicine and movement is life!