



healing words

BY MARK W. McCLURE, MD, MEDICAL EDITOR

anti-aging without the hype

Even though investors are running for cover, here's a hot tip on a surefire investment that is guaranteed to yield a lifetime of incredible dividends. It's as easy as one-two-three: don't smoke, stay trim, and exercise. That's it. Regular readers may recall that I've divulged this information several times in past issues of *Health&Healing*. If you took my advice, you're undoubtedly reaping rich rewards. If you didn't, it's not too late to rebalance your portfolio with three shrewd investments that are guaranteed to yield a healthy return. Here's the prospectus.

Several decades ago, Stanford University researcher James Fries challenged the prevailing notion that, regardless of lifestyle, advancing age is equated with increasing risk of disability. He proclaimed that Americans with lower health risks will have less disability at any given age, less disability later in life, and will live longer than those with higher health risks. Health risks were defined as smoking, lack of exercise, and obesity. Many scholars dismissed his "compression of morbidity" hypothesis as simplistic and impractical.

Undaunted, Dr. Fries set out to prove his theory. He studied a group of University of Pennsylvania graduates whose lifestyles had been tracked since 1939. He assigned risk factors to each participant based on three factors: body weight, smoking, and exercise habits. Each risk factor was rated from 0 to 3 based on predetermined criteria. The scores for the three risk factors were then totaled and participants were assigned to one of three separate risk categories based on their scores; low risk 0-2; moderate risk 3-4; and high risk 5-9. These individuals were carefully monitored on an annual basis.

When the study was completed, as suspected, the data confirmed that Americans with lower health risks live longer and suffer less morbidity. Indeed, he found that the low risk group had 100 percent less disability

and 50 percent less mortality when compared to the high-risk group. Furthermore, when disability occurred, it was postponed by approximately seven years in the low-risk versus the high-risk group. In addition, for those in the study who died, the low-risk group had less cumulative disability and less disability one and two years prior to death than those in the high-risk group. The moderate-risk group also benefited. Although the results were not as impressive as those from the low-risk group, the moderate-risk group still experienced significantly less morbidity and mortality when compared to the high-risk group.

Based on current understanding, these results should not come as a surprise; smoking, obesity and lack of exercise are known risk factors for a wide variety of diseases. So here's the scoop. With regard to smoking, just say NO. Enough said. On the other hand, say YES to exercise since all-cause mortality is inversely related to total exercise. For example, couch potatoes have an eight-fold incidence of strokes and heart attacks. Unfortunately, three-quarters of Americans fall into this category. Couch potatoes are also more likely to be obese, which carries its own health risks: an increased chance of developing back and joint disease, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.

Now for the good news. It's possible to immediately improve the value of your portfolio. All it takes is commitment to stop smoking, lose weight, and exercise regularly. Even modest changes can make a huge difference. Losing even small amounts of weight lessens the chance of developing cancer, and simply taking a vigorous walk six times a month cuts the risk of premature death in half. Therefore, stash the TV, skip the snacks, throw away the cigarettes, and get up and boogie!!! Your investment will be richly rewarded. I promise. (Trust me. I'm a doctor! ©) h&h

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