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Motion is Medicine

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Motion is Medicine

On average, each American spends about \$1,000 per year on pharmaceuticals. This puts the United States in first place in the world for usage of pharmaceuticals.

In fact, it is 40 percent more than what the next country (Canada) spends. America also ranks number one in usage of antipsychotics, drugs for dementia, respiratory problems and rheumatoid arthritis. [Source: <https://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/Health-at-a-Glance-2013.pdf>]

One of the reasons for this could be that rates of chronic disease, such as heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and others, are greater than in other developed countries due to high levels of obesity, lack of physical activity and unhealthy nutrition.

It is amazing how willing we are to spend tremendous amounts of money on medication, and yet we are so unwilling to consider alternative ways to treat and prevent disease (where possible). One of the cheapest (in fact, free!) and most effective forms of medicine is physical activity!

Movement of the human body is extremely powerful and provides so many physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual benefits. Research proves that not only can physical activity prevent chronic disease and illness, it can actually assist with treatment of disease and improve quality of life. According to the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), regular physical activity can provide the following benefits in relation to chronic disease:

- Lower the risk of stroke by 27 percent
- Reduce the incidence of heart disease and high blood pressure by approximately 40 percent
- Reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease by approximately 40 percent
- Reduce mortality and the risk of recurrent breast cancer by approximately 50 percent
- Lower the risk of colon cancer by over 60 percent

- Lower the risk of developing Type II Diabetes by 58 percent
 - Active individuals in their 80s have a lower risk of death than inactive individuals in their 60s
- These are powerful statistics to showcase how physical activity can play a key role in preventing the development or recurrence of chronic diseases. Some benefits of physical activity include:

- Better control of body fat
- Improved sleep
- Increased energy levels
- Improved psychological and emotional well being
- Increased muscular strength and endurance

While working with severely obese patients and treating them with lifestyle medicine (physical activity, healthy nutrition, stress management, etc.), I witnessed many people who suffered from chronic disease, improve symptoms, reduce medication intake and improve their quality of life many times. Patients were able to get off blood pressure medication, anti-depressants, cholesterol medication, inhalers and many other drugs that, although they help the symptoms, can be detrimental to the person's overall well being.

One key lesson to learn is that most medications treat the symptoms (which is sometimes necessary); however, they do not usually treat the cause of the ailment. Using physical activity as medicine can treat symptoms and it can treat the cause of the ailment. Movement of the human body is powerful — the body was designed to be in motion in order to function to the best of its ability. ■



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