



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY – THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

The Dow Retiree Health Empowerment Program for 2008 will focus on physical activity and its positive effect on both preventing and managing health problems. We will be encouraging you to become more physically active as individuals and as groups, using the **President's Challenge** as the framework for our year-long physical activity challenge. If you'd like to familiarize yourself with the President's Challenge, visit their website at www.presidentschallenge.org/home_seniors.aspx.

The retiree survey revealed that more than half of our retirees participate in regular cardiovascular exercise (e.g., walking, biking, swimming) at least three times per week; however, two-thirds do no strengthening activities. Meanwhile, personal physical limitations keep almost 20 percent of retirees from being physically active, and 10 percent experience limited mobility because of poor physical conditioning (endurance, strength, flexibility).

To address these issues, we must look at the ABC's of Redefining Exercise: **A**dapting, **B**roadening, and **C**reating. In this issue, we will look at **A**dapting.

Adapting Activity to Your Abilities

Historically, physical activity has been defined rather narrowly, both in communications about exercise and in our own minds. We believed we had to walk at a strenuous pace and/or for a long time; we thought we had to lift heavy weights; we assumed we had to be stiff and sore afterwards. And for many of us, "traditional exercise" was just not possible because of health problems or chronic pain.

In their newest recommendations for physical activity for older adults, the American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend at least 30 minutes of endurance activity per day; however, they emphasize that this activity is effective *in bouts as short as 10 minutes*. If you haven't been active at all, start with 10 minutes per day, then gradually increase your daily time either by adding minutes or by adding a second exercise session each day. And while you should break a sweat and breathe a little heavier, you should not feel that you are straining yourself. There is no required speed; maintain a pace that is **moderate** for you.

To view the new physical activity recommendations, visit www.acsm.org and click on "Updated Physical Activity Guidelines" in the "focus on:" box in the upper right corner.

The best form of exercise is the one that **you** can do. For example, walking may be great exercise, but not if you have arthritis in both hips! Activity that emphasizes the upper body, such as swimming or rowing, may be the best choice for you. Don't like the water? Tie a stretch band around the doorknob, sit in a chair facing the door, and row. Rake leaves. Wash the car. The key is to keep going for at least 10 minutes without stopping. You can find a list of suggested activities at http://www.presidentschallenge.org/the_challenge/active_lifestyle.aspx# and click on the link "**all kinds of activities**" in the second paragraph.

The bottom line is; don't force yourself to engage in physical activity that is too difficult, impractical, and/or painful. Do what you can, and do it regularly; that means a minimum of three days per week, and preferably five to six days per week (always take a day of rest!). Set a goal of engaging in physical activity for a **total** of at least 30 minutes each day.

Important Note! Consult your physician before starting an exercise program and/or if you have or are at risk for a chronic health condition (e.g., diabetes, hypertension). If you have arthritis or other orthopedic problems that cause pain with physical activity, a physical therapist can help you design a program that will work for you; ask your physician for a referral.