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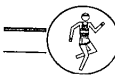
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By Barry Franklin
special writer

THE POSSIBILITY of reducing the risk of heart attack by distance running emerged almost 30 years ago following the autopsy report of the famed marathon runner, Clarence DeMar, who died at age 70 from cancer. Medical findings revealed that his heart's arteries were two to three times normal size with only minimal narrowing from fatty-cholesterol deposits.

Two additional lines of evidence subsequently emerged to suggest that regular exercise was beneficial to the heart.

First, studies of occupational groups demonstrated that physically active people had a lower incidence of heart disease than their sedentary co-workers.

Second, research showed that endurance exercise beneficially affected many of the "risk factors" associated

with heart disease, promoting decreases in body weight, blood pressure and certain blood fats, and increases in the "protective" high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol level.

UNFORTUNATELY, SOME exercise enthusiasts assumed that if a little was good, a lot was better.

Others went so far as to take the overzealous position that long distance running may confer immunity to heart disease. This view gained considerable interest and some credibility until researchers provided concrete evidence that severe and sometimes fatal heart disease occurred in some marathon runners. Certainly, when author and running guru Jim Finn dropped dead while jogging, the irony was inescapable.

How much exercise is enough? The fact of the matter is that there is no proof that excessive exercise can reverse or halt the progression of heart disease. Moreover, there is not evidence that long distance or even marathon

Heart health Moderate exercising just as good for you

running offers any more protection than does less vigorous physical or recreational activity.

Indeed, it appears that the protective benefits of exercise can be derived at MODERATE levels of exercise — far from the fevered pitch some Americans have adopted.

Researchers from Harvard and Stanford universities have recently demonstrated that men with the fewest heart problems were those whose regular physical activity habits caused them to burn 2,000 extra calories of energy per week — the equivalent of walking or jogging three or four miles per day, four to five times per week. Beyond this amount, the protective effects of exercise appeared to level off.

"We're not talking about an amount of exercise that's overwhelming or overbearing," commented Dr. Ralph Paffenbarger, director of the study.

SIMILARLY, STUDIES at the

Stanford Heart Disease Prevention Program have shown that a "threshold" of eight to 10 miles of walking or jogging per week is all that is required to raise the beneficial HDL cholesterol level.

Other medical authorities have also cited new evidence from their research studies highlighting the value of low-to-moderate level exercise for cardiovascular health.

"It appears that an extra 1,500 calories a week gets you the benefit," says Dr. William Castelli, director of the landmark Framingham study of heart disease. "That's roughly 15 extra miles a week — running, walking or crawling. It's not that much."

Barry A. Franklin, Ph.D., a West Bloomfield resident, is director of Cardiac Rehabilitation and Exercise Laboratories, William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak.

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