

fitness

Barry Franklin



Warmup exercises are good for everyone

Question: What effect does warmup, or the lack of it, have on the heart? Why is warmup particularly important for cardiac patients?

Many athletes believe callisthenics and warmup exercises prevent muscle and tendon injuries, which sometimes occur with abrupt strenuous activity.

However, scientists at UCLA medical center have recently demonstrated that warm-up exercises may also be beneficial to the heart — possibly preventing serious cardiovascular complications.

THE RESEARCHERS studied young and middle-aged men. None showed any signs of heart disease as judged by an electrocardiographic (EKG) exercise stress test. Following this evaluation, each subject underwent two separate bouts of sudden strenuous exercise, one with and one without a prior warmup.

When subjected to a sudden intense period of running on a treadmill (with no warmup), more than two-thirds of the men showed abnormal EKG changes, signifying inadequate blood flow to the heart muscle.

When a warm-up period of easy jogging in place

preceded the sudden strenuous exercise, the abnormal EKG changes were oftentimes eliminated or reduced in severity.

The results of the study suggest that sudden strenuous exertion may place demands on the heart that cannot be matched immediately by its circulation. Without a gradual warm-up, the heart may not get enough oxygen. The end result may be heart attack or dangerous EKG rhythm disturbances.

THESE FINDINGS may explain why sudden death or heart attack sometimes occurs during abrupt strenuous efforts — for example, running to catch a bus.

In summary, it appears that the body takes time to make some of its complex physiologic adjustments, and one such example is the increase in blood flow to the heart muscle.

While warmup is recommended for everyone, it is particularly important for cardiac patients who already have a reduced blood supply to the heart muscle.

The writer is co-director of cardiac rehabilitation at Sinai Hospital and a faculty member at Wayne State University's Medical School. Questions may be sent to him in care of this newspaper.

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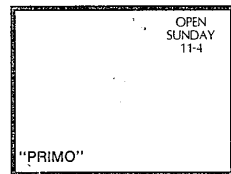
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