

YOU ARE THE FACE OF FITNESS

Did you know that we have a health and fitness crisis in this country? We actually do, and the numbers are alarming. If you're reading this article, chances are you're not part of the problem, but are you part of the solution?

For those of you who have trained for and completed a triathlon, you deserve a pat on the back. A major pat! You have taken your medicine, and your medicine is exercise. "Medicine?" you ask. Yes! There is a "dose response" relationship to exercise and activity. What this means is, just like a drug, if you take your dose (exercise), you will get a response (less risk for disease). In a study published by *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* (the most reputable journal in exercise science), it was found that more activity is associated with all cause mortality rates, total CVD, CHD and mortality, type 2 diabetes, total fat, colon and breast cancer, and osteoporosis. These are the diseases for which there is very strong evidence. And the studies confirming these results are very commonplace. There are many more studies showing such evidence as well. This is only regarding exercise alone—not diet. Yet 50% of Americans don't meet the physical activity recommendation of 30 minutes of moderate daily exercise. Amazing, isn't it? There is so much research stating just "do this" and you'll be healthier, yet only 50% of folks take it seriously enough to do it—hence a crisis.

Yet, this is not you. You see the benefits. You have probably seen benefits that go way beyond disease prevention and into total wellness. The ACSM recommends that everyone expends between 1000 and 2000 calories a week doing exercise. Why? Again, more activity (calories expended) is associated with less risk for disease. When you get down to it, this is by no means an astronomical amount of exercise. That's probably less than most triathletes expend in 1-2 workouts!

There are more alarming statistics. Over 65% of the United States is either overweight or obese. And the rates for childhood obesity are up over 30%. We already know that obesity is a precursor to heart disease. In fact, for the first time since we humans have been prowling around the earth, we are now seeing cases of Type 2 diabetes in youth. For those who don't know, Type 2 diabetes is the type that is attributed to lifestyle, and it used to take years for it to show up in somebody who has not taken care of themselves. Isn't this a sad state of affairs? The number TWO cause of death in the U.S. is poor diet and inactivity. In fact, 15% of all deaths stem back to these lifestyle choices. If you're wondering what number ONE is, it's cigarette smoking. The disease which is responsible for the most deaths is cardiovascular disease. Are you getting the correlation? So much of our demise has been due to our own choices. So one has to wonder why people just aren't getting it. Why are we simply not doing what we need to do?

So that's the crisis. The good news is this has gotten the health and fitness industry's attention. More and more health organizations are coming up with solid plans to battle the lifestyle crisis we are currently in. Many health and fitness experts have begun using the *Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change* to get people going. This model was originally used for smoking cessation. The model has 5 stages, and 5 states to reside in. We can move back and forth within the stages. The stages look like this:

- Precontemplation: In this stage, the person isn't even thinking about exercising.
- Contemplation: In this stage, the person is thinking about exercise, believes it's probably important, but hasn't done anything yet.
- Preparation: In this stage, the person believes exercise is important and is now coming up with a game plan. The person is calling gyms, looking for trainers, looking for help online.
- Action: In this stage, the person is on an exercise plan and they are doing enough, but he or she hasn't been doing it long enough (6 months) for it to be a habit.
- Maintenance: This is the stage we strive for... Doing enough and doing it for longer than 6 months.

Within each stage there are motivational tools experts can use to get people to the maintenance stage. For example, in the very early stages education is really the only thing you can do (like this article!). But later in the action stage, setting new goals and finding new activities is what works best. This is where you come in! Multi-sporters can become fantastic teachers through their lifestyle. Nothing makes somebody want to do something more than seeing another doing it and smiling and really loving it! Lead by example.

What we like to do in the fitness industry is begin by getting people to commit to walking every day. Just get people moving, walking or an equivalent. Don't bore them with target heart rate and anaerobic threshold—just get them moving. Once this routine has become a foundation, we like to get people doing something more intense such as jogging 2-3 miles 3 days per week—or again, its equivalent. (This is also the time that we try to get them interested in strength training.) Again, the idea is that this is slightly more intense. And finally, once a steady diet of cardio has been followed, then we hope to get people hooked on a sport—any sport. Triathlon, running, tennis, power walking, swimming, you name it. Why? You already know why. Sports are fun! If we get somebody involved in a sport, we're far more likely to get and keep them in the maintenance phase so that drop out it is fairly unlikely. By the way, do you know which phase has the greatest drop out rates? It's the **action stage** (doing enough but not long enough to be a habit—6 months). So this is where we hope to get somebody involved in goal setting, and fun sports. Multi-sporters probably have the calendar circled as to when the first race of the year is. But can you imagine if your only mode of exercise was jogging for 2-3 mile 3-4 days per week (which is fantastic)? Would you have the SAME motivation to keep going? I would guess not. We all need goals.

It's my opinion that one of the best ways to tackle our health crisis is one person at a time. Blast education works to an extent, but there are issues among that as well. But people will often be led by people who are doing something that *works* and they *enjoy*. So the next race you enter, think about not only racing for a PR or a T-shirt, or even an award, but to set an example. You are the cover of the best book written on fitness. Your steps and cadence speak louder than the most bold print in the most respected periodical. You're showing people whom are in your circle how you like to spend your Saturday mornings. You look fit, you're healthy, you have a nice tan (I know that's not good anymore ☺), you're happy. And all this because you found a way to physically express yourself. Who would have thought that so much went into your multi-sport training plan? I'll close with this... If you get an opportunity to tell someone how good

you feel when you get out and get moving, encourage them to find an activity they'll enjoy and maybe you've got that person out on the road!