



MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

They're Baaack, Again!!!

As I noted in an editorial in the *AMAA* Summer/Fall 2005 issue, a college classmate of mine, Henry Solomon, MD, a cardiologist, published *The Exercise Myth* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 1984). He came down particularly hard on running but snuck in the thought that walking regularly might not be such a bad idea. Solomon received a lot of publicity and sold some books. Fortunately, since even back then the scientific evidence showed that just about everything he had to say about exercise was wrong, the media eventually caught on and the book drifted out of mind and off bookstore shelves.

Even though *The Exercise Myth* is long gone, the anti-exercise myth is still with us and periodically rears its ugly head. In the April 17, 2005, issue of *The New York Times Week in Review*, Gina Kolata, usually sound and science-based, published an article titled "The Body Heretic: It Scorns Our Efforts." The article was based on interviews with an oncologist, sociologist, psychologist, and one preventionist. Obviously none of them were familiar with the massive amount of scientific evidence showing one can affect one's own health in many positive ways, at any time of one's life. Focusing on regular exercise, Kolata concluded that "there are real limits to what can be done to reverse the damage caused by a lifetime of unhealthy living." Of course there are "limits." But when reading that article one might conclude "why bother," rather than "let's see just how much I can stretch those limits, for myself, at any age." Fortunately, Ms. Kolata's article came and went too.

The anti-exercise nuts have struck again, this time on the cover of *Time* magazine (Aug. 9, 2009). It heralded a lead article by John Cloud, "Why

Exercise Won't Make You Thin." As a regular exerciser for the last 30 years and a triathlete for the last 27, I feel sorry for Mr. Cloud. He begins his ruminations by telling us he is a regular exerciser himself and absolutely hates it. Oh that poor guy! Actually, if I were to try his particular workout schedule (which seems dull) I wouldn't like it either, and might come to hate it too. And there lies the first fallacy in Mr. Cloud's opus. He chose an exercise program he doesn't like. Even though there are loads of others available, he apparently hasn't tried them. Most of us who exercise regularly like it, if not love it, and usually have fun doing it. Poor Mr. Cloud seems to be missing something.

Next, Mr. Cloud sets up a convenient two-legged straw man and then easily knocks him down. The two legs are: a) regular exercise is the principal modality for achieving weight loss, and b) most regular exercisers do it principally for weight management. No, Mr. Cloud, many weight-loss experts advocate regular exercise as an *adjunct* to any weight-loss regimen, not as the centerpiece of it. It is well-recognized that the key to weight loss is to take in fewer calories in a balanced diet, over time. It is also recognized that lean body mass, a well-known result of resistance exercise, uses more calories than fat body mass. (He does mention this; however, it's buried in his lengthy piece.)

Mr. Cloud sets up another straw man when writing about how the latter makes you hungry so that you, oh my gosh, will actually end up putting *on* weight if you exercise regularly as part of a weight loss program! Well, yes, if you eat greasy food after exercise or "reward" yourself with a high-fat muffin. But if post-exercise you eat healthy carbohydrates which are easily metabolized by the body and

not easily turned into fat, then it's all gain...or rather, loss.

Mr. Cloud runs a negative riff on willpower and its role in making health-promoting behavior change. He quotes two psychologists who think that no one can maintain it for very long. A full response to that one requires much more space than I have here, but suffice it to say that the central element of what folks refer to as "willpower" is effective, rational, reasonable *goal-setting* to mobilize and maintain our motivation (see "The Ordinary Mortals® Pathway to Mobilizing Motivation" at www.ordinarymortals.info). If done correctly, you can exercise regularly and maintain weight loss for as long as your mind and body permit you to. Regular exercise makes us feel good and feel good about ourselves, it makes us look better to ourselves and others, and therefore forms a positive feedback loop to maintain and perhaps even enhance our motivation.

There is one plus in the article. Mr. Cloud does advocate what in ACSM's Exercise is Medicine™ Program is termed "Lifestyle Exercise," which happens to be the subject of my "Talking About Training" column on page 17. But his mention of that is lost among all the negatives he gleaned from his personal negative experience with regular exercise and from a rather select group of researchers and studies. And so, one can predict with confidence that Mr. Cloud's article will join Ms. Kolata's article and Dr. Solomon's book in the dustbin of discarded anti-exercise writings. Unfortunately, it will have caused some damage on its way.

Go well,
Dr. Steve Jonas