

The Truth about Cardiovascular Exercise, Part I by Tony Bevilacqua, CPT.

Cardiovascular exercise is one of the most misunderstood concepts of fitness. I want to take the time to give you some eye opening information about this wonderful system in this 3 part article, but let's first take a look at what cardiovascular is. Cardiovascular refers to three different things...the heart, lungs, and vascular system. These three components work together to provide your body with oxygen and other nutrients via the blood. It also shuttles waste products from the body to different elimination points. Without this system it would be impossible to survive. It is very important that the cardiovascular system is working effectively in order to keep the body in great health.

One key thing to remember about the cardiovascular system is that it does an excellent job adapting to the demands of your everyday life. If you are a sedentary person, your cardiovascular system does not have to work very hard to do its job. It does **NOT** mean that you have an unhealthy cardiovascular system, it just means that it has been trained to do its job at a low level of activity. As soon as more activity is incorporated into your life the demand of the cardiovascular system is increased and it must adapt to the new demands. It does NOT mean that you have a healthier cardiovascular system than a sedentary individual, it just means that you have trained your system to handle higher workloads than a sedentary individual.

So what makes our cardiovascular system unhealthy? The answer is quite simple, it's the substances that we put into the system, specifically, the food and the air we breathe. Because the cardiovascular system is responsible for transporting these substances throughout the body, you can see how important it is to make sure the substances you are putting in are high quality. This is a critical thing to understand in this article! You can try to offset the health related issues associated with poor diet like high cholesterol and high blood pressure with exercise, but I can assure you, it will not be as effective as you may think. I have worked with many clients with cardiovascular related problems and let me tell you, I can change their fitness level (their ability to work harder), but their cardiovascular health may not show a significant improvement. This is because their eating habits have not changed. It is the clients I work with who change their eating habits that see DRAMATIC improvements in cardiovascular health along with their improved capacity for work.

A person who does **NOT** exercise at all has the same chance of regaining their cardiovascular health as someone who does a lot of cardiovascular exercise. All it takes is a shift in their eating habits. The big difference between an exerciser and a non-exerciser is their capacity for physical work. This should really be an eye opener for people who are using long bouts of cardiovascular exercise specifically for improving cardiovascular health. Think about how many people you know who exercise religiously and still have high blood pressure or high cholesterol. Yet they still go through their long bouts of cardiovascular exercise day in and day out in hopes that their health status will miraculously change. If you put crappy fuel in your car it will not run well. The fix is not to put in a bigger engine, but instead to change the gas. Once the gas is better, if you still want the bigger engine, you have a solid foundation for it to run on.

Now this article is certainly not meant to be anti-cardiovascular exercise, but merely to emphasize the importance of what we put into our bodies and the significant impact it has on our overall health. I am first and foremost a fitness professional and utilize cardiovascular exercise as a way to help people improve fitness levels all the time. If someone comes to me with a specific goal of lowering blood pressure, I would recommend them to a dietitian. I would also help them get started on an exercise program because of the many other benefits of exercise, but there is no such thing as a workout specifically designed to reduce blood pressure or cholesterol. We need to focus on regaining health through nutrition, then, we can use fitness to improve the performance of the cardiovascular system.

In part II of this article I will talk about the ridiculous brainwashing of our society on what cardiovascular exercise should be. I promise it will be another eye opening article that will make you think twice about how you train your cardiovascular system.

Tony Bevilacqua is an expert personal trainer and owner of Anytime Fitness in Pewaukee, WI (www.anytimepewaukee.com). You can contact him at tbev3@hotmail.com.