

## To live longer, use a bit of muscle!

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*An Australian study recently showed that performing regular bodybuilding exercise is associated with a significant decrease in the risk of dying prematurely, particularly of cancer.*



### UNIVERSAL MEDICATION

It is often said that if a **pill** could provide all the benefits of physical activity, it would become an instant global success. This assertion is not exaggerated: it has been clearly demonstrated that the regular practice of physically moderate exercise (walking, jogging, cycling) is associated with decreased risk of developing at least 35 distinct diseases, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, 13 types of cancer as well as declines in cognitive functions. These benefits are even observed with relatively feeble quantities of exercise; for example, as little as 15 minutes of moderate physical activity each day (such as walking) is sufficient to significantly reduce mortality due to cardiovascular diseases. It is thus not necessary to be an elite athlete in order to profit from the benefits of exercise on health: the important thing is to not remain sedentary and to move as much as possible, even if it is only for a few minutes.

### TRAINING THE MUSCLES

Since minimal physical activity is good for the health, it is obvious that one could considerably increase these benefits by being even more active. One such physical activity, a type of exercise which is often neglected and which ought to be practiced in a more widespread manner, is weight training. Studies have shown that these bodybuilding exercises are essential, not only to improve force and endurance, but also for the general improvement of health, and that the benefits are supplementary to those provided by aerobic exercise. It is for this reason that organisms which promote physical activity, such as the American College of Sports Medicine or World Health Organization, recommend at least two sessions of muscle training per week, along with a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity.

### REDUCTION IN MORTALITY

This positive effect of weight training is illustrated by the results of a large study involving 80,306 adults over 30 years of age who had participated in two national surveys on health and lifestyle in the United Kingdom (*Health Survey for England* and *Scottish Health*

*Survey*). By analyzing the physical activity habits of the participants, the authors noted that the simple habit of regular participation in bodybuilding exercises was associated with a 23% decrease in the risk of premature mortality and a 31% decrease in mortality linked to cancer<sup>1</sup>. When individuals adhered to both recommendations of the WHO (two periods of muscle training and 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week), the protection was even greater, with a reduction of 30% in the general risk of dying. In other words, the addition of muscle training exercises to a routine of physical activity increased the positive effects of exercise on reducing the risk of premature death.

One important finding from this study was the observation that all forms of muscle training exercise provided these benefits. One would normally associate weight training with the use of heavy weights, but the results of the study showed that exercises performed without equipment such as sit-ups, push-ups, dips and even lunges are equally effective. Gyms remain the best location to improve one's muscular strength, due to the diversity of equipment and the skills of the trainers found there. They allow a variety of exercises, performed under proper supervision, to optimize the time that is put in there. By exercising at regular hours and by featuring bodybuilding as a regular entry in the agenda, training becomes a social activity which increases one's adherence to exercise, allowing you to meet other people who share your motivations and so contributes to fighting off solitude and the isolation of individuals.

<sup>(1)</sup> Stamatakis E et al. Does strength promoting exercise confer unique health benefits? A pooled analysis of eleven population cohorts with all-cause, cancer, and cardiovascular mortality endpoints. *Am. J. Epidemiol.*, published online October 31, 2017.