

# The Most Potent Prescription - Rx Exercise

The Most Seriously Un-Filled Prescription in America

By Gary Westlund

We're hearing and reading nearly every day about prescription drugs in America; their high cost to consumers, to insurance companies and HMO's, to the government and taxpayers, and that not everyone who may benefit from a prescription drug is getting their drug prescriptions filled.

What we hear less frequently, but very important to know, is *that not every drug is equally effective in everyone who uses them*. That's right. Prescription drugs are often effective for only 30-70% of patients who use them, regardless of their cost.

Sometimes we're reminded that prescription drugs often have unintended ill side-effects in the patients who use them. In rare cases, those ill effects include death. Yet, on balance we're much better served by having necessary prescription drugs than not having them. Otherwise we wouldn't be so concerned about their cost or how to get more of them. Modern pharmacology has improved the quality of many lives.

**Take the drugs your doctor prescribes for your special health needs. But, don't neglect the growing medical recommendation to fill your exercise prescription, your Rx Exercise.**

There is no prescription drug that offers the potency of exercise to keep us healthy, reduce or eliminate a variety of serious disease risks, and even help manage some chronic diseases. Many drug prescriptions would never even have been needed for individuals if only they had first and regularly filled their own exercise prescription. Many drugs for a variety of "lifestyle" diseases would not be necessary if our behaviors had kept us healthy and fit. Many individuals have **reduced or eliminated** their drug prescription dependency by changing their lifestyles<sup>1</sup>.

Healthful lifestyle requirements include (1) stress management, (2) exercising and (3) a balanced, nutritious diet.

***So what is this about exercise as a prescription? Rx Exercise?***

Exercise is an old, old prescription for health maintenance. The exercise prescription is as old as the ancient Greeks. This knowledge about exercise as a prescription for good health was largely lost until the last century. But, since about the middle of the last century, scientific studies and knowledge about the benefits of exercise was renewed and greatly enlarged.

Today we know that **exercise may be the most potent prescription we can each fill every day**. The exercise prescription is generally more powerful and effective for good health than any prescription drug.

"If I told you that I had a formula that would help you live longer, avoid-and even cure-some diseases, relieve stress, and make you stronger with virtually no bad side effects, you'd probably be willing to pay a lot of money for it...what if I told you it was free?...The truth is, I do have a formula like that...the formula is physical activity-simple exercise", writes David C. Neiman, DrPH<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Researcher Stephen Turner, MD, of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, reports, "Of course, if more people lost weight with diet and exercise, their blood pressure would drop, their lipids would improve, and their risk of diabetes would decrease without the need for this type of (cholesterol lowering) drug," From WebMD article of June 28, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The Exercise-Health Connection\_ page 3 by David C. Neiman, DrPH

***What is the Rx Exercise formula that will help most of us enjoy better health, disease reduction and even some better disease management?***

At least 30 minutes of moderately vigorous activity (like brisk walking), at least three times per week will help begin delivering many of the benefits mentioned in this article.

***What do we know about the benefits of adequately filling the Rx Exercise?***

While we cannot say that someone who fills their exercise prescription will definitely live longer, we can almost certainly say that they will live better. This is what we refer to as “Quality of Life” issues.

Here’s a partial list of observed and reported improvements among regular exercisers’ Quality of Life:

- Greater sense of psychological well-being
- Enhanced mood
- Mental stress management
- Anxiety reduction
- Feeling more energetic
- Greater productivity
- Improved relationships
- Better sleep quality
- Improved self-esteem
- Improved body image

Beyond Quality Of Life benefits, here are the commonly observed improvements in the physical condition for those who fill their exercise prescription.

- Improved cardio-vascular fitness – better heart/lung function
- Improved muscular strength and endurance
- Improved fat to lean body mass ratio (Body Mass Index-BMI)
- Improved bone density
- Improved blood lipid profile

***What about preventing serious diseases by filling one’s Rx Exercise?***

Here’s a partial list of scientifically demonstrated benefits of adequately filling our Rx Exercise in **preventing** a variety of serious disease risks:

- Coronary heart disease
- Colon cancer
- Type 2 Diabetes (Non-Insulin Dependent Diabetes Mellitus - NIDDM)
- Osteoporosis
- High Blood Pressure
- Obesity
- Depression alleviation/prevention

It is in just the last few decades that we have begun to observe and learn about the therapeutic benefits of an Rx Exercise appropriate to those already diagnosed with challenging diseases.

Here's a partial list of those benefits to special populations of filling their own Rx Exercise to help better manage their disease:

- Heart Disease
- NIDDM
- Improved Quality of Life for those living with or beyond:
  - Arthritis
  - Asthma
  - Cancer
  - Diabetes (Insulin Dependent Diabetes Mellitus – IDDM & NIDDM)
  - High blood pressure

Aging itself is a passage in life with a wide variety of increasing challenges: physical, emotional-psychological, and social. We now refer to aging as a choice between “Usual Aging” and “Successful Aging”. The most important part of aging is internal, not external. Most of us only see and “treat” the external signs of aging, and miss the most potent age-slowng choices including an Rx Exercise.

*Usual Aging* is what we usually see among our family and friends as they move through the decades of aging beyond age 30, into the 40s, the 50s, 60s, 70s, and beyond. Usual agers tend to be focused on the external “therapies” of attempts at appearing more youthful. Successful agers are focused on their inner person, both physiologically and psychologically/emotionally.

*Successful Aging* is what we witness in those who are more than just apparently younger than their years. Through exercise and training, successful agers actually have maintained very important physiological functions that allow them to function at even age 70 as well as many who don't exercise who are only age 40. They actually have cells that are livelier, energy-producing, and healthier than the usual agers. This doesn't happen by accident, but by choice, by choosing to fill ones own Rx Exercise.

Some of these physiological functions, like VO2Max (the maximum oxygen that one's body can utilize during physical work or exercise) reflect in very significant ways just how alive and youthfully vigorous we are, decline by about 2% per year after about age 30 in the sedentary population. But, VO2Max and other functions have been observed to decline by only ½% per year after age 30 among those who regularly and effectively fill their Rx Exercise<sup>3</sup>.

We each have a choice, a challenge, to live as well as possible. We can choose to age usually or we can choose to fill our Rx Exercise, staying vigorous and functioning at a higher level well into advanced years of life, avoiding many serious diseases, and better managing any bad diagnoses, like arthritis, diabetes or cancer, that may come along.

As many as 60-70% of Americans are not filling their Rx Exercise adequately. It's been estimated that as much as half our medical care dollars are spent on avoidable “lifestyle” diseases. (Lifestyle diseases, including heart disease and NIIDDM, are those highly related to the risks of physical inactivity, smoking, and poor dietary behaviors<sup>4</sup>.)

---

<sup>3</sup> Dare to Be 100 by Dr Walter Bortz

<sup>4</sup> Dr Walter Bortz in his video “Health Wealth: Spending Health Dollars Wisely”

***So, what is the Rx Exercise good for?***

It's good for (1) staying healthy, (2) reducing the risks of a variety of serious diseases, and even for (3) better and more happily managing a variety of challenging chronic diseases.

**Have you filled your Rx Exercise today?**

**Consult your physician before beginning or increasing your own Rx Exercise activities.**

**Consult your physician before ending or stopping your Rx Exercise regimen.**

**Quitting exercise is dangerous to your health.**

**Notes:**

**Physical Inactivity and Poor Diet Growing Threat to Americans' Health**

Deaths in the U.S. due to poor diet and physical inactivity rose by 33 percent over the past decade. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicts that poor diet and physical inactivity may soon overtake tobacco as the leading preventable cause of death.

*Source: "Actual Causes of Death in the United States, 2000" released in 2004 by U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

**Coach Gary Westlund**, American College of Sports Medicine – Health/Fitness Instructor (ACSM H/FI) and USA Track & Field (USATF) Level II Coach Certified, is the Founder/President of Charities Challenge, a 501(c)(3) non-profit. [www.CharitiesChallenge.org](http://www.CharitiesChallenge.org), has seen thousands of lives saved, improved, and celebrated by those happily filling their Rx Exercise.

The CC Mission: To improve health and fitness, reduce health risks, and enhance disease management via goal-oriented training programs.

[GaryWestlund@aol.com](mailto:GaryWestlund@aol.com)      612-245-9160