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# HEALTH & LIFE

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## 60 minutes that save lives Don't just stand (or sit) there

**Exercise promises enormous health benefits without a lot of effort**

BY JOHANNA WEIDNER  
RECORD STAFF

Swedish fitness guru Per-Olof Astrand just shakes his head when people ride escalators instead of taking the stairs.

Such laziness is inexcusable, says Astrand, a professor emeritus in the department of physiology and pharmacology at the Karolinska Institute of Sweden, and considered by many to be the father of physical fitness.

He spoke recently at a cardiac rehabilitation symposium at the Ontario Aerobics Centre in Breslau.

Exercise promises enormous health benefits without a lot of effort, Astrand said. Go for an evening walk or a swim, take the stairs, walk — don't ride — around the golf course, or go bird watching. Just get out there.

After all, he said, "everyone knows the dog needs exercise."

Astrand said the sedentary lifestyle many people have today is relatively new in human history. It emerged when humans switched from hunting and gathering to a more settled, agriculture-based society.

But because we no longer have to exert ourselves to gather enough food to survive, Astrand insists we must find other ways to exercise every day.

That doesn't necessarily mean grueling aerobics classes or hours on the treadmill. Astrand encourages people to incorporate enjoyable physical activities into their day — and stop being slaves to busy schedules.

"Stop and enjoy" is his advice.

Astrand offered a long list of benefits from regular exercise: a decrease in heart rate, blood pressure and obesity, and an increase in endurance, metabolism, muscular strength and release of endorphins, just to name a few.

If someone invented a pill that



Per-Olof Astrand in the gym at the Ontario Aerobics Centre.

LORNA WHITFIELD, RECORD STAFF.

promised the same wonderful results, Astrand joked, he or she would be a multi-billionaire because everyone would take it.

That's why he doesn't understand why more people won't take the simple prescription of daily exercise.

"Exercise can do the same tricks" as that mythical pill, he said.

Instead of advising people to have a full checkup before starting an exercise program, Astrand said they should see a doctor if they plan to continue their sedentary lifestyle.

Very rarely do people die during exercise, yet many people die of inactivity's disastrous effects on the body, which often go undetected.

"Warning signals come late, maybe too late," he said.

Studies show a person's fitness deteriorates with every year of inactivity.

Fitness is measured by the volume of oxygen a person can consume while exercising at maximum capacity. People who are fit have a higher level of oxygen uptake and can exercise more intensely than people who are not well-conditioned.

After age 25, a sedentary person's oxygen uptake drops by 10 per cent every decade until age 50, when deterioration accelerates to 15 per cent. By contrast, an athlete only loses five per cent every decade.

Thankfully, it's never too late to start exercising. A wiry 80-year-old himself, Astrand encourages even the elderly to exercise to "keep the machinery going."

Even little efforts can have a big payback. Just eight weeks of regular physical exercise can produce a measurable improvement, Astrand said.

If you have difficulty doing something, repeat it eight times to train the body.

Sixty minutes of exercise a day is all that's needed to reap the huge health benefits of exercise, and the time can be spread throughout the day, Astrand said.

So, get out and walk the dog. If you don't have a dog, walk yourself.

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## Exercising with heart

**Thousands of heart and sports injury patients have visited Schaman centre**

BY JOHANNA WEIDNER  
RECORD STAFF

Cardiac rehabilitation is a burgeoning medical field and even the experts are still learning about the effects of exercise on ailing hearts.

Experts from Canada and Sweden shared their discoveries and challenges at a recent cardiac rehabilitation symposium held in Breslau at the Ontario Aerobics Centre, a cardiac rehab and sports medicine clinic run by Dr. John Schaman.

Schaman hosted the symposium in honour of the centre's 25th birthday.

Cardiac rehabilitation was a new field when the centre opened in December 1978.

The first exercise class was held the following June, with patients walking circuits around the tennis courts until a 200-metre exercise track was constructed that fall.

In addition to exercise, the centre also provides patients with cardiac health tests, lectures and counselling to control risk factors including diet, smoking, obesity and stress.

Schaman has learned a lot from the last quarter-century, more than 10,500 cardiovascular patients, 23,000 sports injury patients and almost 114,000 hours — the equivalent of 13 years — of supervised exercise.

He discovered the most dangerous time for cardiac patients is not during



Dr. John Schaman hosted a cardiac rehabilitation symposium to celebrate 25 years since his Ontario Aerobics Centre opened.

exercise, but afterward. Ten patients have suffered acute heart problems at the clinic, all after their exercise period ended.

"Post-exercise is much more critical and much more risky," Schaman told the audience of cardiac rehabilitation professionals from across the province. "That's not the time to relax."

He said patients need adequate time after exercise to cool down, although a shower should be avoided for half an hour.

Observation is crucial. Schaman gives a lecture after exercise to ensure patients linger at the centre so professionals can keep close watch for signs of trouble.

Schaman said it's not known why patients are more vulnerable after exercising. He speculated that the large leg muscles used while walking help the heart circulate blood, and it's this extra pumping power that is suddenly

lost when exercise ends.

Schaman has noticed an unusual development in some of his cardiac rehab patients.

For example, a 50-year-old man who suffered from angina after a heart attack joined the exercise program and eventually had improved stamina. The angina faded, too.

Four years later, during a test on a treadmill, the patient's cardiogram looked unusual and Schaman referred him for an angiogram.

The specialist decided not to perform the specialized heart test because the man was healthy and had no symptoms. A couple of months later, after exercising at the centre, the man's heart stopped.

The case puzzles Schaman and other cardiac care professionals.

"We're making the patient better, we're improving their exercise tolerance and removing their symptoms, but the disease is progressing," Schaman said.

Gender differences in cardiac rehabilitation are being studied by Dr. Terry Kavanagh, associate professor at the University of Toronto's faculty of medicine. He spoke at the conference about his research into exercised-based programs and how exercise benefits the heart.

"The most powerful predictor for both men and women is the strength of the physician's recommendation," Kavanagh said.

He has found men are more often referred to an exercise program after suffering heart problems than women.



Dr. Terry Kavanagh, a speaker at the symposium, studies gender differences in cardiac rehabilitation at the University of Toronto.

LORNA WHITFIELD, RECORD STAFF.

However, several factors other than sex also contribute to referral patterns. Referrals are more likely when patients had good health before the cardiac problem, have a good social-economic position and are well educated, and live in a city (where programs are close by).

Yet encouraging women to join an exercise program is important because they reap great rewards, often more than men, Kavanagh said.

He's found significant improvements in the amount of lean body mass and body fat in women who participate in exercise rehabilitation, plus a reduction in anxiety and depression.

However, he also pointed out that women usually have more body fat and less lean body mass than men, and feel higher anxiety and depression after

suffering a heart problem.

But more research must be done to measure the benefits to women of cardiac exercise because most studies are based almost entirely on male patients, he said.

Although the field continues to evolve, Schaman's outlook on heart disease has not changed since his clinic opened its doors.

"Heart disease is a disease of choice," Schaman said.

People choose how much they exercise, what they eat and whether they smoke.

Personality traits are also risk factors, Schaman said. Potentially damaging traits include hostility, cynicism, anger, aggression, perfectionism, isolation, impatience and competitiveness.  
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**TOMORROW IN**

## PERSPECTIVES

While libraries in Waterloo and Kitchener are studying expansion proposals, London public library is setting its own example by opening a three-floor operation in a downtown mall.

Don't miss it.

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