Swim for Your Life

Water activity has proven health benefits, but did you know that men can cut their risk of death in half by simply doing a few laps?

May 25, 2010 By Kate Ferguson

Compared with runners, walkers and all unrepentant couch potatoes, men who swim have the lowest death rate, according to a 2009 University of South Carolina study, published in the *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*.

Researchers came to this conclusion after evaluating comprehensive physical exams and behavioral surveys from 40,000 white, well-educated, middle- to upper-class men, ages 20 to 90, enrolled in the Aerobics Center Longitudinal Study (ACLS).

The study followed these men for 32 years and took into account swimmers' age, body mass index (BMI), smoking habits, alcohol consumption, hypertension, other medical factors and family history.

Besides swimmers registering lower death rates, findings also showed that they had better cardiorespiratory fitness than walkers and inactive people.

"These lower [mortality] rates in swimmers compared with walkers and sedentary men might well be expected," says Steven N. Blair, PED, a professor of physical education, and the study's lead author, in the university's press report. "But it is surprising that we also observed lower mortality rates in swimmers than in runners."

Although the study did not include a more diverse population sample, Blair says that the benefits of swimming would likely be no different for women or men in other socioeconomic groups.

In an earlier study of men and women in the same socioeconomic group, Blair says, researchers found that both sexes had similar fitness and health benefits from swimming.

The findings also showed that regular swimmers had better cardiorespiratory fitness than walkers and inactive people.

"Swimming provides a healthful alternative to traditional modes of exercise for improving cardiorespiratory fitness and health for the general population, as well as for patients suffering

from chronic diseases," Blair says. "And swimming may be a good alternative exercise for individuals who cannot participate in running or other forms of physical activity."

And that's more than enough reason for everyone to dive in the pool.

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