What is the right amount of exercise for Goldilocks?

Is 100 minutes too small? Is 400 minutes tooo large? What number is just right? Two new large-scale studies shed some answers to the question. The exercise guidelines call for a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate level activity but is the minimum of the ideal? And is there a safe upper limit?

Two studies have recently been published in the JAMA which help to answer these questions. The first study, from the National Cancer Institute, Harvard University and other institutions pooled data from 6 ongoing health survey with information from more than 661,000 adults (most middle-aged). They stratified adults by their weekly exercise time from none to 25 hours/week and compared 14 years of death records for the groups.

- The non-exercisers were at the highest risk of early death.
- Those who did a little exercise, but not meeting the recommendations, lowered their risk of premature death by 20%.
- Those who met the recommendations (150 minutes) had 31% less risk of premature death.
- Those who tripled the exercise to 450 minutes/week had 39% less risk.
- Those who did 10 times the guidelines had the same risk as the 450 minute folks so the “sweetspot” seems to be at 450 minutes a week.

The other study of 220,000 Australian adults included not only exercise time but also exercise intensity.
- Meeting the exercise guidelines substantially reduced the risk of early death, even if it was moderate (walking)
- Spending 30% of your exercise time in vigorous exercise had 9% less chance of premature death from those who met the moderate guidelines.
- Spending more than 30% time in vigorous exercise reduced this to 13% reduction of mortality.

So what is the verdict? Shoot for 150 minutes of physical activity. Get more bang for your buck by having 20-30 minutes of it being vigorous. How to make that happen? Make a weekly plan, write it on your calendar, find an accountability partner and remember that exercise is just as important for brain health as it is for the body.

Thanks for taking part in the Fitness Challenge this semester. I hope the habits you have made during the past 8 weeks will carry on into your daily life.

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