



Exercise to Repair Your Heart

Heart patients have always been advised to stay away from exercise. However, a new study report presented by researchers at the European Society of Cardiology meeting last week suggests exercise might actually be good for the heart. According to them, exercising might even help the heart repair itself by encouraging creation of new heart vessels.

The report was based on a study by Dr. Robert Hollriegel and colleagues at Leipzig University in Germany. Covering only a very small population of 37 people, the researchers observed production of new stem cells in the bones of people with serious heart problems who rode a bike for 30 minutes daily for four months. The researchers also found that such patients had more small blood vessels in their muscles. No change in either vessels or muscles was observed in patients who did not exercise.

Heart failure is normally seen in people over 70 years of age. Many of these patients can not even manage to walk a few steps without feeling short of breath. However, doctors believe light exercise such as walking or cycling can help even such patients achieve certain level of recovery. In their opinion, such patients should first be examined by a doctor to determine their maximum limits of exercise endurance.

They should then be advised exercise only up to those levels and doctors should ensure that the same are not exceeded. According to the researchers, if necessary, the exercise regimen advised to these patients should be supervised by health professionals.

Were not talking about patients with acute heart problems, said Dr. John Cleland, a heart failure specialist at the University of Hull in Britain who is spokesman for the European Society of Cardiology. Dr. Cleland was not involved in Dr. Hollriegel's research.

This is to prevent people from getting into a cycle of deterioration where they're afraid to exercise and they just avoid any activity that leaves them

out of breath, he said. Any sort of physical activity increases the amount of blood being sent to muscles by up to 10 times and thereby puts a strain on the hearts arteries and muscles.

To relieve the muscles of this stress, the body dispatches stem cells to the site of stress. These stem cells may repair any damage that has been caused by the stress. The researchers hypothesised that if patients continued to exercise, the influx of stem cells might help the body adapt to the stress. The construction of new blood vessels and strengthening of muscles may help in this process. These benefits however can be gained only if the patients continue to exercise on a regular basis.

According to Dr. Cleland, heart failure patients should indulge in just enough exercise that leaves them breathless at least once day. In his opinion, pushing their heart to the limit of its capabilities would help make it stronger.

People think that if they have heart failure, then they're at the end of the road and they can't exercise, said Dr. Freek Verheugt, a cardiologist at the University of Nymegen in the Netherlands. But this study shows that exercise can work to produce new blood vessels, even in patients with serious heart disease. Because no drugs exist to produce new stem cells, exercise may be the only method for some patients to rebuild their hearts, he added.

We are not saying that patients should run marathons, but there is no other way to augment your arteries, said Dr. Francois Carre of Rennes University Hospital in France. Patients have to exercise if they want that.

Earlier studies have already linked physical therapy following a heart attack with longer life expectancies in patients. Experimental studies in rats have also suggested that exercise can even be more effective than statins, drugs that are commonly used to treat heart disease.

While doctors do routinely recommend exercise

to patients, they do not advise it as standard treatment. Dr. Carre thinks that should change. We need to write patients prescriptions to exercise the same way we write prescriptions for drugs, he said.

People have been trying for years to create a polypill to treat many different parts of heart disease, Carre said. But that already exists. Its exercise.