Does Regular Swimming Reduce Your Risk of Dying?

Steven N. Blair, P.E.D. - University of South Carolina

Physical inactivity is documented as a major public health problem, and inactive and unfit persons are more likely to develop chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and other ailments lose function with age and thereby lose their independence and die prematurely. Most of the evidence on physical activity and health is from experimental studies of aerobic exercise, typically running and epidemiological studies of self-reported physical activity habits or measured physical fitness. Evidence from the Aerobics Center Longitudinal Study (ACLS) indicates that individuals who report swimming for exercise have baseline risk factor profiles similar to runners, and better profiles than those who are sedentary.

Recent analyses in the ACLS have addressed mortality rates in sedentary individuals, walkers, swimmers, and runners. More than 40,000 men in the ACLS completed an extensive medical examination, including a self-report of their physical activity habits, and were then followed for several years for mortality. Preliminary analyses show that mortality rates in swimmers were less than one half those observed in sedentary men ($p<0.01$). Future analyses will evaluate mortality rates in walkers and runners. We conclude that men who swim for exercise have better survival rates than their sedentary peers.