

Active diabetic men live longer: study

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By Martin F. Downs

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Brisk walking may be a key to longevity for men with type 2 diabetes, new research suggests.

Looking at data on thousands of men with type 2 diabetes, Dr. Mihaela Tanasescu, of Touro University International in Cypress, California, and colleagues found that men who walked regularly were less likely to die than those who were more sedentary.

What's more, the faster the men walked, the less likely they were to develop heart disease or to die from any cause, including heart attack and stroke.

"Exercise is advised in diabetes, especially for controlling glucose (blood sugar)," Tanasescu told Reuters Health. "But this is showing that farther down the road, it's going to reduce these people's risk of heart disease -- heart disease being their primary risk."

Heart disease is to blame for about three-quarters of deaths among people with diabetes.

The new findings were published online this week in the "rapid access" issue of *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

The data Tanasescu and her colleagues analyzed came from a study of more than 51,000 male health-care professionals that began in 1986. The men were 40 to 75 years old when the study began.

Among all these men, 3,058 had type 2 diabetes. Tanasescu's team excluded 255 of them because they had physical disabilities, which would limit their ability to exercise. The remaining 2,803 were followed for 14 years, and every other year during that time they answered a questionnaire about their exercise habits.

Over the course of the study, 266 men had heart attacks or strokes. Ninety-six of them died as a result. In all, 355 of the men in the study group died.

The researchers found that men who walked the fastest were the least likely to die from any cause, no matter how much time they spent walking.

The greatest reduction in the risk of heart disease was seen in men who spent about three to five hours a week walking at a brisk pace.

According to Dr. Jonathan Myers, of the Veterans Administration Hospital in Palo Alto, California, who wrote an editorial accompanying the study, it's no mystery why exercise might prolong the lives of diabetic men.

"Exercise is known to increase insulin sensitivity, improve glucose tolerance, and promote weight loss, and reduce triglyceride levels," he told Reuters Health.

Tanasescu said she focused on walking in her analysis of the data because it's the most common form of exercise. Not everyone swims laps or goes jogging, but everyone does at least some walking.

However, Myers said, "too many people do a minimum amount -- walking to their car, to the front door, and that's about it."

Both Tanasescu and Myers agreed that doctors should make exercise a major part of every diabetic patient's care.

"The physician has to advise and guide patients in an exercise program, not only for controlling glucose, but also making it clear that this is likely to reduce their most important risk," Tanasescu said.

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