

Statement by
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September 14, 1999

Introduction

As the host of PBS-TV's Body Electric show for the last 14 years, I have introduced thousands of viewers to exercise with resistance (using hand-held weights). Born in 1946, I belong to the first wave of 78 million Baby Boomers and have had a front row seat to the fitness movement created by my generation. In the past, we exercised for a toned appearance. We now recognize that the effects of exercising with weights have far greater implications.

Most people have not integrated the use of lightweights into their healthy lifestyle. Exercises designed to strengthen the muscles and bones, and aerobic exercise, perform separate, but equally important functions. It is essential to the well being of the entire population to become familiar with the benefits of resistance-type workouts. Hopefully, the Baby Boomer generation will successfully battle preventable diseases with regular exercise.

Research done at Tuft's University by Miriam E. Nelson, Ph.D., (documented in her book, Strong Women Stay Young) proved that women who lifted weights just twice a week had bodies that were 15 to 20 years more youthful after one year! Their bone density increased, as did their strength, energy, balance, metabolism, confidence, and happiness. Without dieting, they traded fat for muscle and appeared more trim and fit.

Develop Federal Guidelines

Official guidelines for our well being are provided by agencies such as The USDA, The American Cancer Society, and the American Heart Association. I am aware that several Federal agencies are presently developing strength training materials and guidelines for the older population, however, they do not currently exist. Nowhere can we find the "ultimate" guidelines for strong muscles and bones, better balance, energy and metabolism. Federal exercise guidelines made available to every health provider would greatly increase public awareness.

Offer Public Service Announcements

The largest obstacle that stands between physical frailty and strength is information. Media time is costly and program sponsors traditionally appeal to the 25-55 year old audience. Reaching the entire population requires a focused media plan. Public Service Announcements influence large segments of the population. An aggressive media campaign would be the most effect tool to disseminate information crucial to maintaining healthy muscles and bones.

The Partnership for a Drug Free America is an example of a private, non-profit, non-partisan coalition of professionals from the communications industry, whose mission is to reduce illegal drug use in America through media communication. They spend more than \$0.90 of every dollar on drug prevention messages and programs. To date, more than \$2.8 billion in media exposure and some 500 ads have been donated to the Partner's national campaign, making it the single, largest public service ad campaign in history. Result: today there are 10 million fewer drug users than there were in 1985.

Create a Measure of Vitality as an Adjunct to Chronological Age

A campaign to empower Americans to assume increased responsibility for their well being should have inherent rewards. The National Institute on Aging is currently researching tools to categorize people in terms of mobility and strength. I recommend that a table of standards be established to identify individuals' biological age. This would provide important information not supplied by chronological age. With overall vitality being the baseline, a formula would be developed to reflect variations from the norm. A physical fitness rating system would have dynamic implications in all areas of society.

Conclusion

There is a critical need to provide widespread education about exercise. This information must reach people of all ages, fitness levels. The following agenda would greatly increase public awareness:

- adopt Federal guidelines for healthful exercise (ex: ten basic strengthening exercises which work all of the major muscle groups and can be done at home using inexpensive, hand-held weights);
- establish a media campaign utilizing Public Service Announcements (modeled after the Partnership for a Drug-Free America) to promote public awareness of healthful exercise and its benefits; and
- create a "vitality scale" to be used in addition to chronology to define age.

This is an exciting time to redefine age and stretch its limits. We grow up, and then we grow old. With regular, moderate exercise we have the power to redefine aging as a continuum of growing stronger. Exercise is more than child's play. This is about who lives, who dies, and the quality of their life experience. Education is the key.