

Should We Question The Wear and Tear Model in Medicine?

I often hear patients mention how they don't run because it's bad for your knees. The other day I had a patient tell me that snow shoveling has to be the worst activity for your back. In medicine we are often guilty of promoting fear of movement. It isn't something that we do intentionally but is a result of societal beliefs about movement. The human body being compared to a machine is often an example that we like to use in medicine. This example can be helpful for a patient to understand certain aspects of health but can also create the idea that just like a machine, our joints will wear out. Although degeneration does happen, many patients believe doing any of these movements will "ruin" their joints. When actually a moderate amount of movement can be preventative for joint issues. When I explain this to patients I usually talk about health on a spectrum. On one side of the spectrum we have the "couch potato". We don't want our patients living here for obvious reasons such as increased risk for non orthopedic health issues, diabetes and heart disease. However, some studies have also shown increased knee and back degeneration similar to individuals on the other side the activity spectrum such as marathon runners. Living on the far right of the spectrum helps to reduce your risk of non orthopedic health issues but increases your risk of orthopedic issues. We have a job to educate our patients about the pros and cons of both ends of the spectrum. However, the patients that are likely to be the most concerned about running or lifting being "bad" for your joints are often on the far left of the spectrum. With that being said I think we have a job to decrease fear around movement and to promote improved health.

Sedentary Person

Increased risk of:

Heart Disease
Diabetes
Degenerative joint issues



Moderately Active Person

Decreased risk of:

Heart disease
Diabetes

Preventative for:

Knee and spine degeneration

Active Person

Increased Risk of:

Degenerative knee a

Decreased risk of:

Heart disease
Diabetes

In summary, the health of our society is not getting better. As physical therapist we are uniquely positioned with the knowledge to help our patients make changes that can really effect their health. By helping our patients become healthier we can help to reduce chronic disease which could help us impact persistent pain.

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