

Does Fitness = Health? - by Denie Hiestand

So you are off to the gym today? You do your aerobics class, maybe catch a weekly Pilates or Yoga class. You get out in the weekend and pound the pavement or go for a 20-kilometer bike ride. You look at your body in the mirror and you are reasonably happy with what you see and you know you are fit. But are you healthy?

You eat what you think are the right foods, lots of greens, whole grains, or may have even succumbed to drinking a soy latte. You know you are fit. But are you healthy?

You look at your muscle tone, definition, the tight butt, even the stomach is not sagging as much. Yes, you say to yourself – I'm fit. But are you healthy?

You went out on Friday night, had a ripper of a Saturday night. Friends come round on Sunday and by Wednesday afternoon at work you are knackered and think God, I wish it was Friday. But hang on a minute - you thought you were fit.

Why is it there is never enough energy? Why is it that by 3pm most afternoons you are willing the clock to read 5 o'clock? Why is it that most nights instead of having an abundance of energy, you just want to sit down, or go to bed early? But hang on a minute - you thought you were fit!

The true definition of fitness is not actually how much iron you can pump, how many minutes of continuous step aerobics you can do in one session. The definition of fitness is actually another word, and it's called endurance.

The definition of fitness, indexed to endurance, is how long the cells can maintain oxygen levels given X amount of physical exertion. And cell oxygen levels, given X amount of physical exertion, has more to do with health or rather the vitality in your body, than it does to what we generally refer to as fitness.

In a nutshell, the body is just a big oxygen pump.

As I have stated many times in my writings and lectures around the world. Your endurance, your vitality and your overall feeling of well-being, is totally indexed to how that oxygen pump works, how the cells are able to absorb oxygen, and going one step before that, how much oxygen can saturate the blood.

Just because you can give yourself a good hard 2 hour workout in the gym and then feel knackered for the next 3 days is not a measure of the level of your fitness even though the 2 hour workout in the gym was pretty impressive and you feel mighty good about it.

I love skiing. And I remember one winter in North America, I was skiing with a group of friends and their macho buddies. All passionate, gym members and I remember the lunchtime conversation centering on their prowess, impressing the girls with their gym workouts. But by 3 o'clock in the afternoon, even giving them their 25 years of age, I was fair thrashing them on the steep downhill runs. Come 4 o'clock and at the end of a particularly fast punishing run, where I cleaned up once again, the group finally caught up to me and one of the young 25 year olds looked at me and asked me how on earth could I do that at this time of day and then followed with a dry, pointed comment, blimmey you don't even work out daily!

You see, at 58 years of age, my endurance was way above the 25 year olds yet seemingly I was not as fit as they were. They will slaughter me in a 2 hour gym workout. They regarded themselves as extremely fit. But healthy? No, they were not. Thus, 6 hours on the ski field and they were the knackered ones and I was ready to party! And in fact that night, Shelley and I were the only ones, out of our group, to go dancing at the local club.

Yes, movement, going to the gym, doing all the things you do, can get you fit, can get you strong, and can even help you to be healthy. However, fitness on its own has never ever been scientifically proven to create a healthy body.

In fact, when we look at the research, more people die of heart attacks jogging and doing extreme fitness programs than a similar age and demographic that do not do any so-called hard, physical activity.

So perhaps we confuse fitness with health.

My wife's father is another good example of that. At age 67 he died of a heart attack, 7 years after he had been re-plumbed with multiple bi-passes. He was fitted with a new set of pipes, which were squeaky clean and he was the fittest man I had even known. He was an absolute fanatic in doing everything right in the fitness realm. He played tennis with gusto, swam, played a lot of golf, cycled daily, in fact had a fitness regimen that would make most 20 year olds gasp for air!

Yet his autopsy report read like an armchair sports addict. His arteries were 85% completely blocked up. Inside he was an extremely unhealthy human being. Yet he had always prided himself in eating the Heart Foundation recommended diet. And he was so fit!

This personal story that is so very close to me is duplicated by many millions in the western world. Extremely fit – yes, but healthy? No.

As in many clients I know, their endurance, their staying power, is certainly not indexed to their perceived fitness. Why is this?

As I mentioned earlier, if we want to look at the way the body works, health at a cellular level really is indexed to the oxygen availability of the cell, times hours, which equals endurance.

So what factors limit the cell oxygenation process? Of course the first thing that comes to mind if obviously diet. The body in reality is essentially a fatty acid mammal. If you haven't got the fuel going into the body that the body can refine down and process into essential fatty acids, which are the oxygen carrying components, you cannot deliver the oxygen to the cells in a continuous uninterrupted process. Basically, you run out of puff.

And all the work in the gym that you can possibly manifest doesn't create essential fatty acids.

If your diet is severely lacking in digestible protein, you will have long-term limitation of the oxygen carrying capacity of the essential fatty acids. That is why vegetarians with a diet high in vegetative matter often suffer from severe protein deficiency coupled with extreme shortness of duration in any intense physical activity.

The reason being the body cannot digest vegetation because of our short digestive tract, coupled with the fact that vegetation has very little to zero essential fatty acid producing compounds.

Take a cow for example, the world's most efficient herbivore or vegetarian. Even with her four-stomach system and twice grinding her vegetables at 5,000 pounds per square inch, still doesn't exactly run and jump around the paddock all day. In fact, she is an extremely docile and energy conserving animal. Her movements even in a natural environment are predominantly confined to slow, ambling, walking.

The wolf, at the other end of the spectrum, eats pure essential fatty acids, namely the fat layers of its kill, the organs of its kill, and the blood of its kill. And can run continuously for up to a 150 kms a day. And that, with only one feed every 3-4 days.

I remember when I was farming (before crazy government ruling that we had to cook the farm dogs meat), when we fed them raw bone marrow and fat from the home kill, the farm dogs could run around the big sheep stations for days on end during the autumn muster, without tiring.

Now that we have changed our farm dogs diet to a grain based diet contained in the hard biscuits and convenience foods (yes, we feed our dogs convenience food these days). As any old shepherd will tell you, 'they ain't what they used to be.' They tire and get sore joints.

The other big influencing factor of the oxygen availability to the cells is mineralization. Our modern diet with its processed, and manipulated food, coupled with modern agricultural processes is woefully short of available minerals.

Without adequate mineralization in the body, the process of bonding the oxygen molecule in the blood to the essential fatty acid compounds does not take place. Without adequate levels of mineralization all the vitamins in your local health food shop are relatively useless to you. So, without the mineralization coupled with adequate levels of essential fatty acid producing proteins, all the gym work in the world will not give you a healthy body.

So let's flip it the other way, instead of spending so many hours working on your fitness levels maybe you could achieve a tremendous improvement in your fitness, your duration and health by increasing the available protein and minerals in your body with the added advantage of decreasing your workout time. Now that's a different concept!

Some years ago, working with the Swiss Olympic ski team, I worked with their nutritional advisors and completely changed their diet to an extremely high essential fatty acid producing one, basically pouring in as much minimally cooked animal protein into their diet, putting them on an electrically harmonized rebounder for an hour a day, and taking out four hours of fitness trainings per day. Low and behold, every measurable fitness and health parameter in their bodies increased.

So you see, this is not just a belief structure, I have seen many times over, the oxygen carrying potential of the blood relating to health and fitness dramatically improve with the right diet. However, one must remember that whey and soy proteins are not digestible or available proteins. They do not carry the essential fatty acid compounds in their structure. They are not food and do not give you fitness or health.

Only food that is able to be broken down into essential fatty acids can give you true fitness, abundant duration and vibrant health.

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