

## You have one body; treat it nice

By Charles Clines



My main reason to begin running some 27+ years ago was to take care of my body. One of my mantras, even before I began running, was that you are given only one body, so take care of it. Because my dad and one of my uncles died relatively young, I became aware that I might have to take extra steps to remain healthy. Those extra steps would come by beginning a running regimen.

When I first laced up my first pair of running shoes and headed out the front door to begin my journey of running, I knew it couldn't be just a fad. My reason to choose running at that time was this would be a convenient way to exercise; no trip to a gym and no expensive equipment to buy. After reading *The Complete Book of Running* by James E. Fixx, I was pumped up. He maintained that running and a good diet could keep a body healthy and young for many years.

Though Fixx died at a relatively early age, and ironically while running, I believed his message. Considering his family history, it was my opinion that running probably prolonged his life to 52. His father had lived to only 43 before dying of heart problems. And before Fixx began running, he was overweight and smoked. If he had continued that lifestyle, he probably wouldn't have survived as long as he did.

His death also underscored the fact that being in good condition doesn't necessarily mean a person is heart healthy. A person can be in good condition, as Fixx was, but have blocked arteries, as he did. If he had had regular physical exams, which he didn't, a doctor might have discovered his heart problems and possibly provided medication or surgery to prolong his life.

There are debates about whether running helped him live longer, but my mind was made up and I was determined to start a healthier lifestyle. I was going to set aside time to run or jog just as I would set aside time to eat. Running was to become a part of my lifestyle.

It's something I've never regretted, but I also discovered that running and jogging doesn't bullet-proof a person from heart problems. However, I also believe that because of running, I was able to know I was having problems. I began having trouble completing a long run. I often would have to walk after going only a mile...and getting that far sometimes was a struggle. I wasn't progressing in my training as I should have been.

My physical exams showed nothing wrong; low heart rate, low to normal blood pressure and I could ace the routine stress test. But my cardiologist went farther when I explained my troubles and scheduled an angiogram. Surprise! I had three arteries with 75 percent blockage. Three stents later, I was up and running again and now I'm not having the same problems.

Anyway, again the point is; you have one body, so take care of it. I've seen people take care of their cars or animals better than they do themselves.

When I took some personal training lessons, another statement has stuck with me is ``The human body cannot thrive without regular physical activity. The body wears out faster when it is idle." I sometimes

argue with this statement when I want to skip a workout because I just don't "feel like it." The other statement I like is "You either build health or disease."

The second part of my "health program" included a better diet. So, that meant I had to start reading food labels. You shouldn't do this with a weak heart. But I did anyway. Wow, what a revelation! High fructose corn syrup and other sugars, along with partially hydrogenated oils, are in sooooo many foods that I wasn't sure I could find enough food to eat. But I changed my diet and, along with the jogging, I dropped some 25 pounds in just a few months. I actually looked sick. As usually happens, though, your body adjusts and some of the weight comes back. As far as finding enough food, I did discover that running causes you to find food. The quantities of food a runner/jogger eats definitely increase.

So, if there are any of your family members argue about the health benefits of running, just say that most of the evidence shows that it's good for you. Do as I did, too. Start slowly and gradually build up. I went from not being able to jog a mile to eventually completing a few marathons. And I never thought I could run a 10K.