Pistol shooting and good health

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National physical guidelines for good health suggest four ways to improve the level of activity you undertake. It needs to be noted here that the aim of the Australian government providing these guidelines is to help Australians to understand what is required, but also to try to put a dent in the growing health epidemic related to exercise abstention.

It's estimated that most school aged children don't meet daily activity requirements and more than half are overweight. Illnesses and diseases, once found in middle aged adults, are now being treated by doctors in teenagers. Nearly two thirds of Australians are overweight or obese with many suffering prematurely from health problems such as coronary heart disease, diabetes and musculoskeletal problems.

In order to make some impact on these issues, exercise can be considered the cheapest and easiest medical prescription. So what is the exercise prescription for improved health? Firstly, you should look for ways to move rather than avoiding such opportunities. In simple terms this means that, as a society, we have for too long looked for time and effort saving technologies and methods and as a result, we have developed our sitting muscles rather than our movement muscles.

The human backside is meant to create hip extension as seen during walking, running, jumping and cycling. It should not be a cushion we grow so that we have something more comfortable to sit on. Parking a block from the shop, taking the stairs instead of the lift, getting off the bus one stop early and walking the last 400 meters are all ways of increasing our level of movement and helps to improve our general health.

The second suggestion for increased health is to be active every day in as many different ways as possible. This can be anything from gardening to a leisurely walk along the beach or a casual walk to the shop for bread and milk. The objective is to simply incorporate more movement on a daily basis in what is termed incidental exercise.

The good news is that this does not need to be continuous and can be anything from walking more to setting up a work station where you stand instead of sit. The aim is to simply move as much as you can throughout your normal day.

The third recommendation for improved health is to achieve 30 minutes of moderate exercise three to four times per week where moderate exercise is defined as an activity that will cause a slight, but noticeable increase in heart rate. Again, this can be accumulated or continuous and can include a brisk walk, a fast cycle or participating in a recreational sport like tennis. You should still be able to talk easily, but probably not sing - if you're inclined to sing, that is. Remember that this level of exercise needs to be slightly higher than most activities you do daily rather than simply being increased movement. Typically this means that you will have to actually allocate time to do this type of activity.

The final recommendation is to include vigorous activity three to four times per week in addition to the other three recommendations to improve your health. Vigorous activity is the huff and puff type of activity that increases heart and breathing rates and where talking between breaths is difficult. This type of activity really helps improve fitness whereas the first three recommendations aim to improve general health markers such as blood pressure.

If you put together these four recommendations your typical week will look something like this:

- Every day, try to look for ways to move instead of being static whether at work or at home;
- Every day aim to complete either 30 minutes of moderate activity (accumulated or continuous) or 30 minutes of vigorous activity. Ideally you should alternate between these two types of activity every other day for best results.

As a form of movement, pistol shooting is certainly better than sitting on the couch and does meet the first and second requirements for increased daily activity as recommended. The fact that you're standing and participating in something helps with increased daily movement or incidental exercise. However, pistol shooting does not provide the requirements for the final two recommendations where you are working at a moderate or vigorous pace.

I'm sure there are some who would argue with this knowing the intense pressure associated with elite competition. But pressure of competition and physically challenging the body to work at moderate to vigorous levels are a little different. I strongly believe that pistol shooters need to become athletes and need to add to their training programs, a physical exercise regime outside of the shooting range. This improved fitness will provide you with a physical advantage for elite competition. A fitter, stronger and healthier athlete will generally always perform better than one at the same skill level who is not as physically competitive.

The good news though, is that any form of increased activity will benefit your pistol shooting ability. For those who don't have aspirations to reach Olympic level and may not wish to train physically towards that goal, simply increasing daily activity output will still help their pistol shooting performance. If this increased training also meets with the requirements for improved health and well being as suggested by national guidelines, then fantastic.

The ideal scenario is to consider ways to improve your activity that actually helps your pistol shooting performance. Strength training, walking up a hill, cycling etc., all help to strengthen and develop leg muscles for improved balance, stability and endurance required in competition. Vigorous fitness activity helps you deal with the stress and pressures of competition and helps to improve your recovery. So come the next round, you are still fresh and able to compete at the same level.

Fellow these four recommendations for improved health, but also consider the fact that improved health and fitness will make you a better pistol shooter.