

The 30 Pound Club

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Deadly Television

I watch television. No one seems to want to admit it these days so I will. If I could watch more of it, I would. Whether it's the Food Network, a good drama series, the occasional comedy series, or sports, I love it. But there's a lot to do, so I limit how much I watch. That's probably a good thing. Dr. Pam Zelasko, my colleague and physician, sent me an article she found on the relationship between watching television and death. Okay, it was actually mortality, but the word death catches your attention better.

Researchers in Australia used a couple of mortality databases and surveys collected on television habits of over 11,000 subjects 25 and older. What they found: Australians 25 and over watched 9.8 billion hours of television in 2008. The population of the entire country is 22 million so subtracting the 25 and under, that works out to about two hours per day every day of the year.

When they compared those that watched over six hours of television per day with the group that watched the least, the life expectancy was reduced by about five years. Taking the averages and parsing them out, they found that for every 60 minutes of television watched, the lifespan of the viewer was reduced by 22 minutes. That's one third! Thank goodness for DVRs—they reduce each hour of TV to 44 minutes, assuming you skip the commercials.

While this study was primarily theoretical in nature because they didn't actually track 11,000 subjects over time, it's still revealing. But the question is this: Is it really the television watching? The researchers didn't think so. They felt the lack of physical activity was the real culprit, and I agree.

So if you like watching television, get in your workout before you do. Better yet, work out while you watch television. If you watch in real time, do intervals; ramp it up during the commercials and go slow and steady during the breaks. Or use your dumbbells or tubes to work out during the show, and get on the floor for your ab workout during commercials. You'll burn calories, strengthen your heart, and be entertained. Eliminate the guilt of watching television and get moving while you do.

One and Done.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

Reference: Br J Sports Med doi:10.1136/bjism.2011.085662.

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