

You Can't Outrun Death—But You Can Run To Live

From Matthew Little

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If a great white shark stops swimming, it will die. Its body doesn't pump water through its gills. It relies on water flowing through its open mouth and gills as it swims. No movement, no water flow, no oxygen. Dead shark.

People also need to move. If we stay still, we may not die as soon as a shark, but we will die sooner than otherwise, and typically with more disease and pain. Movement is life.

Movement can take any form. Walking is the most essential, but all activity is life-giving. It doesn't matter if you are pushing a lawnmower, carrying groceries, or walking the dog, you can call it "exercise." And exercise can save both your body and your brain.

Exercise is perhaps the single most important thing you can do to prevent Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, suggests research. "Regular exercise can reduce the risk of developing dementia by about 28%. For Alzheimer's disease specifically, the risk was reduced by 45%," according to an analysis of 16 studies done by the Alzheimer's Society in the UK.



Sitting around, meanwhile, is linked with significantly higher rates of dementia.

The same is true of virtually all forms of chronic disease, from cancer to diabetes, heart disease, liver failure, and more.

At a basic biological level, movement activates all of our bodily systems. It gets the heart pumping more blood, which feeds every cell in the body, and pumps lymph through the lymphatic system, to clear out cellular debris and other toxins. Movement also gets synovial fluid into your joints to maintain mobility. Movement lets your muscles flex and your bones bear weight, making your entire skeletal muscle system stronger and denser.

Movement delivers a major mood boost and is one of the most powerful “treatments” for depression. It can also reduce anxiety, and improve cognitive function.

Movement also lets us give expression to what resides deeper inside us through acts of service, creativity, and friendship.

Unfortunately, modern technology is seducing us into a sedentary solitude. We are retreating from the physical world into digital landscapes that nullify the brain, body, and spirit.

To avoid these diminishing effects, we can seek activities we enjoy, like gardening, hiking, or participating in sports. We can also contribute to our communities through volunteer service or go out of our way to help friends with big jobs like cleaning up the yard or tidying an overloaded garage.

When we combine movement with meaning we get a double dose of what makes this human life precious and worth living. We leave our mark on the world and our bodies are the better for it.