

Exercise After 50 – Not Just Surviving but Thriving!
by Ann Cain

A study of older adults found being physically active after 50 was not associated with longer overall lifespan! But it was linked with less chronic diseases – including heart trouble, diabetes, Alzheimer’s, kidney problems, lung cancer and colon cancer – as participants aged.

The study, which is published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, is based on data from 18,670 men and women who turned 50 in 1984. All participants started the study without any major health conditions or chronic diseases. Once participants turned 65, researchers tracked their health, via Medicare claims, for the next 10 years. Those who were in the top 20% for fitness level at the study’s start, were less likely to develop any chronic diseases, less likely to have chronic diseases and were older when problems did develop. (In rough terms, a middle aged man who can run an 8-minute mile and a middle aged woman who can run a 10-minute mile, on a treadmill, would fall into the top 20% for fitness).

At every age, those in top form were not much less likely to die than their couch potato peers. For those less fit at 50, death may come at the end of a long period of gradual health decline, while for the highly fit it is more likely to come suddenly or at the end of a brief illness, preceded by relative health. Older adults may not be able to prolong their lives through exercise and diet, but they can prolong the amount of time they spend in good health.

aarp.org/2012/08/28/the-real-benefit-of-exercise-after-50