3-6-2012

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New UNH Exercise Program Supports Those With Peripheral Artery Disease

March 6, 2012

DURHAM, N.H. – For more than three decades, exercise scientists at the University of New Hampshire have helped people with heart disease – as well as students training to assist them -- with the Cardiac Rehabilitation Program and, later, the Cardiac Prevention Program. Now, the UNH exercise science program has launched a new program – the first in the Seacoast area to help manage the symptoms of peripheral artery disease, or PAD.

PAD is a narrowing of the peripheral arteries, most commonly those in the pelvis and legs, which limits the body’s ability to deliver sufficient oxygen to working muscles. It affects more than eight million Americans. The most common symptom of PAD is claudication, or pain, discomfort or tiredness in the legs that occurs during walking and is relieved by rest. According to the American Heart Association, the most effective treatment for PAD is regular physical activity.

“In addition to managing risk factors like smoking, diabetes, or high blood pressure, we know that patients can effectively treat PAD with exercise,” says Melissa Rodgers, clinical assistant professor in the exercise science option of the department of kinesiology and director of clinical programs. “Not only does exercise increase walking distances and extend the time before the onset of claudication, it can improve the patient’s quality of life.”

Working with UNH exercise science graduate and undergraduate students, participants in the UNH PAD Program will follow an exercise program that is individually prescribed and monitored by a medical director and clinical exercise physiologist. Exercise sessions, which run alongside the UNH Cardiac Rehabilitation and Cardiac Prevention programs, will include a group warm-up and cool-down as well as a standard treadmill protocol for PAD and strength and balance training. Throughout the 24-session program, participants and their doctors will be regularly updated on progress.

In addition, the staff of the program will offer regular educational lectures and question-and-answer sessions about the risk factors and treatments for both heart disease and PAD.

The PAD program meets Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays from 6:15 to 7:30 a.m. at the UNH Field House. Participants in the program will use the UNH indoor and outdoor tracks, gymnasium, and Employee Fitness Center, which has a variety of machines and equipment. Emergency personnel are located on campus, and all PAD program staff is at least certified in basic life support skills.

Cost for the program, which is open to the public, is $200 and includes a pre-program fitness assessment, 24 group fitness sessions, and a post-program fitness assessment. For those who register by Aug. 1, 2012, the program offers a reduced rate of $150 for 18 sessions and the pre- and post-program assessments. Following completion of the start-up program, individuals can continue exercising with the ongoing maintenance program for $5 per session.

To enroll, participants must demonstrate medical clearance with a confirmed PAD diagnosis from a cardiologist or vascular doctor. For more information, contact Melissa Rodgers at 603-862-0597 or melissa.rodgers@unh.edu.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.
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