

## MIDDLE AGED SPREAD

*By RuthC. Martens, M.D., D.Ht.*

After 40, many of my patients eat right and exercise regularly but still have difficulty losing weight. Women are aware of large changes in metabolism around menopause but men also have difficulty. Does something change or is it just in your head?

Actually, there is a real reason our bodies change with age. When we are young, our bodies grow several feet taller in only a few years. The hormone responsible is **human growth hormone (HGH)**. After puberty, HGH declines until our mid 30's. As a result, we increase body fat. When we get to middle age, muscle tone declines, bad cholesterol increases, bone density thins and the skin begins to wrinkle.

**The good news is there is a natural way to cause an increase in HGH through fitness training.** When HGH is released during exercise, it shrinks body fat for 2 hours after training. It is literally the "fitness hormone".

But, you might say, "I already exercise". **The key seems to be the right type of exercise.** Most people know that stretching improves muscle tone, aerobic exercise is good for your heart and endurance and strength training with either weights or resistance will increase muscle fiber. What is missing from these fitness plans is **high intensity, short sprints, also known as anaerobic exercise. This is the type of exercise that makes you hot, sweaty, out of breath and is the one where you "feel the burn" in your muscles.** It is also the one that is essential to release the fitness hormone. Researchers at the University of Virginia School of Medicine found that HGH is released in direct proportion to exercise intensity.

**If you decide to try this type of exercise, there are a few things that will maximize your effort:**

- Before training avoid a high fat meal. Fat decreases HGH.
- Before or after training take 2g of L-Glutamine.
- Drink lots of water during exercise
- Avoid sugar for 2 hours after exercise – even in a sports drink. Sugar stops HGH.
- After exercise take a protein supplement or eat a high protein meal with 25g of protein. (See the online version of this article for a list of protein sources).
- Get adequate deep sleep.

There are three types of muscle fibers. When you exercise, you must develop all 3 muscle types – slow, fast and super-fast. The reason is it takes fast twitch muscle fibers to perform anaerobic exercise. And anaerobic exercise is what releases your fitness hormone.

This does not mean you should avoid all the other types of exercise. The fact is, you need balance, so alternating stretching, aerobic, strength training and building your muscle fiber gradually will avoid injury and give the best results.

**What constitutes anaerobic exercise?** Sprinting can be done on a bicycle, swimming, running or even power walking up a hill. In *Ready, Set, Go! Synergy Fitness*, Phil Campbell gives sample workouts with different starting points depending on your current physical condition. **Anyone with medical conditions or who can't remember the last time they exercised should check with their physician before starting an exercise routine.**

**There are additional benefits to high intensity exercise:**

- It raises antioxidants (see my earlier article online for all the great things this will do for you).
- It increases good cholesterol
- It lowers bad cholesterol
- It increases bone density

After trying this fitness program for one month I can feel a difference in muscle tone and strength but I can also say my favorite part is getting a better workout in a shorter amount of time. Even at the beginning, I felt doing sprints (I use an exercise bike) for 10 minutes was as good as my usual 20 minute bike ride. While I am not ready for the Olympics yet, I have worked up to 8 sprints with rest between. I still hate exercise. But if I have to do it – it helps if I can see results.

Growing older isn't an option. But we don't have to feel older. Come on, I'll race you.

*Dr. Martens is a family physician specializing in natural medicine and homeopathy in Wheaton. For more information or to make an appointment, call (630) 668-5595.*

[Current and previous articles available at [www.martenshealth.com](http://www.martenshealth.com) ]