

Lack of exercise may be a medical condition

By Eliza Barclay, NPR

Doctors need to prescribe exercise to patients who don't get enough exercise, a Mayo Clinic expert says.

"You've got a bad case of deconditioning," the doctor says.

Actually, it would be the rare doctor who would say that to anyone. And though it might sound like something to do with hair, in fact, deconditioning is a familiar and more profound problem: the decidedly unnatural state of being physically inactive.

At some point in the last few decades, the human race went from being a species that is active most of the time to one that is increasingly sedentary. The Lancet recently called it an "inactivity pandemic," responsible for 1 in 10 deaths worldwide. That's a major shift, and a major public health problem, many researchers have pointed out. Inactivity is linked to heart disease, diabetes and some types of cancer.

Now Michael Joyner, a physiologist at the Mayo Clinic, argues in a commentary out this month in the Journal of Physiology that one way to deal with the problem is to make physical inactivity a mainstream medical diagnosis. It's one of the most common preventable causes of illness and death, and Joyner writes, there is "one universally effective treatment for it – exercise training."

Shots called up Joyner to get him to elaborate a little more on just why doctors need to get more involved with this problem.

"The entire medical research industrial complex is oriented

towards inactivity," he tells us. Insurance companies will reimburse patients for pills for diseases related to inactivity, but rarely for gym memberships. "Physicians really need to start defining the physically active state as normal," he says.

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