

Potential cardiac dangers with extreme exercise

By Kevin Helliker, Wall Street Journal

A study finds that exercise that is extreme in either volume or intensity may be associated with high levels of atherosclerosis in the coronary arteries.

The study, presented in August at a meeting of the European Society of Cardiology, studied 169 veteran competitive endurance athletes against a control group of 171 relatively sedentary subjects. Compared with the control group, the study found lower levels of coronary artery calcium in athletes who ran fewer than 35 miles a week or cycled fewer than 150 kilometers a week. But athletes who ran or cycled beyond that threshold were found to harbor higher levels of coronary artery calcium than did the control group.

The study, conducted by British physicians, is certain to intensify debate over one of the most controversial questions in modern medicine: Can people exercise too much? By all accounts, exercise lowers blood pressure, helps preserve coronary-artery integrity, lengthens lifespans and otherwise promotes physical and mental health. Exercise is medicine, say public health officials.

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