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SMA: EXERCISE DOES HELP PREVENT OSTEOPOROSIS

Sports Medicine Australia (SMA) has rejected claims in the weekend press that exercise may be of no benefit to osteoporosis prevention, and has urged caution in reporting of health research.

The claim that there may be little role for exercise in the prevention of osteoporosis was based on a study of active and retired soccer players. It comes just after the release of ‘*Shaping Up*’ by the Commonwealth, a report which shows that more than half of the Australian population is physically inactive and as a result at risk of major health problems.

Dr Shona Bass, Sports Medicine Australia spokesperson and Senior Lecturer at Deakin University specialising in osteoporosis prevention, reiterated that the most effective way to reduce the risk of Osteoporosis later in life is to take action now – regular weight bearing exercise and a well balanced diet with plenty of calcium.

Dr Bass said that the study referred to in the weekend press was of a very small sample, and a great number of other factors may be at play.

“Don’t stop exercising yet,” said Dr Bass.

“To accurately address this question a long-term exercise intervention study is required. The long time interval between exposure (exercise in childhood) and outcome (bone density in old age) makes these types of studies difficult to conduct. For that reason researchers look at retired athletes as models.

“Most research using retired athletes has clearly shown that there is greater bone density in particular sites in retired athletes related to the unique loading patterns associated with their training in childhood.

Dr Bass said that her research showed that female gymnasts who had been retired for up to 20 years had higher bone density at the weight bearing sites – this increased bone density if maintained into older age would reduce their fracture risk by half.

“If exercise is continued throughout life, not only is bone density maintained, but the additional health benefits of increased muscle strength and improved balance help prevent the likelihood of falls and fractures.

Research has also shown that in general, individuals who have engaged in regular weight bearing exercise most of their life have higher bone density than those who have been sedentary. Thus “Lifelong, regular weight bearing exercise is the ideal – but beginning a regular exercise routine at any stage in life can still have significant benefit. It’s never too late to start exercising.”

◆ Further information or to arrange interview contact Jane O’Dwyer ◆

◆ Telephone (02) 6251 6944 or 0419 93 7336 ◆

◆ E-mail jane.odwyer@sma.org.au ◆

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◆ E-mail jane.odwyer@sma.org.au ◆