



JACC

JOURNAL of the AMERICAN COLLEGE of CARDIOLOGY

Leisure-Time Running Reduces All-Cause and Cardiovascular Mortality Risk

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JACC. August 2014; 64(5):472-481

Abstract

Background Although running is a popular leisure-time physical activity, little is known about the long-term effects of running on mortality. The dose-response relations between running, as well as the change in running behaviors over time, and mortality remain uncertain.

Objectives We examined the associations of running with all-cause and cardiovascular mortality risks in 55,137 adults, 18 to 100 years of age (mean age 44 years).

Methods Running was assessed on a medical history questionnaire by leisure-time activity.

Results During a mean follow-up of 15 years, 3,413 all-cause and 1,217 cardiovascular deaths occurred. Approximately 24% of adults participated in running in this population. Compared with nonrunners, runners had 30% and 45% lower adjusted risks of all-cause and cardiovascular mortality, respectively, with a 3-year life expectancy benefit. In dose-response analyses, the mortality benefits in runners were similar across quintiles of running time, distance, frequency, amount, and speed, compared with nonrunners. Weekly running even <51 min, <6 miles, 1 to 2 times, <506 metabolic equivalent-minutes, or <6 miles/h was sufficient to reduce risk of mortality, compared with not running. In the analyses of change in running behaviors and mortality, persistent runners had the most significant benefits, with 29% and 50% lower risks of all-cause and cardiovascular mortality, respectively, compared with never-runners.

Conclusions Running, even 5 to 10 min/day and at slow speeds <6 miles/h, is associated with markedly reduced risks of death from all causes and cardiovascular disease. This study may motivate healthy but sedentary individuals to begin and continue running for substantial and attainable mortality benefits.