

Nursing Notes—August 28, 2020

We were hoping against hope that we'd all be able to report to classes together this August, live and in-person. But Covid-19 cases are skyrocketing nationwide, and we Americans find ourselves in much the same state of public health as we found ourselves in March 13, when we offered students a 3-week "Spring Break" that more or less never ended.

You'd expect the school nurse to write his Back-to-School Nursing Notes on the pandemic—but I'm going to save that for next week and share with you the results of a study conducted at my old alma mater, the University of Texas at Austin. According to a report on the 2-minute daily radio program "Health in a Heartbeat," UT researchers "asked physically active graduate students to sit for 10 hours and take fewer than 4000 steps per day. On the fifth day, students were given milkshakes to see how their bodies would metabolize sugar and fat after prolonged inactivity. The grad students then repeated the inactive behavior for 4 more days, followed up by a run on the treadmill on the fifth day."

This probably sounds like some Aldo students' "dream test"—the old take-it-easy-and-drink-milkshakes test. (No, we are not giving this test at ALCS and recording the results in Powerschool....) "Health in a Heartbeat" reports, "The researchers were surprised by their findings: The grad students' metabolisms had become sluggish." OK—that's *not* the surprise; we all know that our metabolism can change abruptly, even during a 3-day illness. Here's the key finding: "*Exercise did not undo the negative effects of inactivity.*"

It's easy to gloss over that last sentence, so let me dwell on it a little longer: Going for a half-hour run, say, after sitting for 8 hours in front of a computer does not confer as great a health benefit as we might think. (This was troubling for me to hear, because I've stayed away from the gym since March, and that half-hour run is my key mode of exercise.) The UT researchers inferred that "by spending most of our time sitting, we don't see much physiological effect from exercise."

Dang! That finding floored me. In fact, I don't really want to believe it's true. But who am I to mistrust UT-Austin researchers with advanced degrees in science? This year's Aldo class schedule actually addresses this finding, though I think we staff were proceeding more from instinct and personal experience than basing our schedule on UT Physiology Department research. Our schedule has many breaks in it, because online education itself doesn't offer the built-in opportunity for walking the halls, playing frisbee at lunch, or generally enjoying the horseplay that is part of being a teenager (or a youthful—immature?—staff member) that life in a bricks-and-mortar school does. Some of the spare time we built in to our schedule can be used for tutoring or conferring with a teacher; but students (with a little nudge in the butt-cheeks from parents, perhaps) should obey the decades-old cry of the grumpy adult: "Go outside and play!"

With a mask, of course.

See you on Monday, good people—

Jim McIntosh