

Aerobics

Kenneth Cooper

This book changed my life. Have followed its advice since days in Vietnam

Running, swimming and cycling, the big three. Raise your heart rate to the target zone and keep it there long enough to do some good - twenty minutes or more.

I started when the book came out in 1968. I initially ran a mile, then worked up to four miles a day. What the book didn't tell you is that eventually it takes a toll on your knees. It may be better now, with well-engineered running shoes to absorb some of the impact, but after about twenty years my knees couldn't take the strain. Arthroscopic surgery, and then a switch to bicycling and a bike machine.

And... I still spend thirty minutes a day simulating 18 mph on the exercise bike, and do a lot of real bicycling and swimming in the summer. Cooper's work was with young people. My observation is that the age-based formulas for target heart rate are too conservative. Though the charts indicate a maximum just over 160 and a workout target under 130 for a guy of 65, I kept the exercise heart rate of 140-145 for decades; I never felt like I was straining myself. I conclude that the body can maintain an accustomed rate of exertion to a greater age than experts would project.

A Soviet-style joke (this will cost me "helpful" votes, but I'll live dangerously). Last summer I cycled across Kiev to a Democrats Abroad picnic. Several of the old war horses, progressives who had progressed past Social Security age, remarked on the fact that I had come ten miles by cycle. I told them to think nothing of it. Another four years of socialist progress under Obama and we will all be riding bicycles.

Absolutely five stars. This was a seminal book.