

## NO SWEAT!

### Think Yourself Stronger

Thinking about exercise could help make muscles stronger.

In an unpublished Cleveland Clinic Foundation study, a group of 10 adults ages 20 to 35 imagined moving a weight with their little finger. Another group of 10 imagined using their elbow flexor muscles to move a weight. All did it for 15 minutes every weekday for 12 weeks. A control group of 10 did no mental exercise.

The first group increased finger strength by more than 35%; the second group boosted elbow strength by 13.5%. The control group didn't change.

Remember: Visualizing is no replacement for doing actual exercise, says Vinoth Ranganathan, a senior research engineer at the clinic. The improvements in this study came from changes in the central nervous system delivering better signals to existing muscle tissue, not from muscles growing.

by Eric Metcalf

## BOOST CIRCULATION

### Pre-op Warming Cuts Post-op Infections

When British researchers covered 277 patients with air-filled warming blankets or a warm dressing on the proposed incision site for half an hour before surgery, postsurgery infection rates dropped nearly 70% compared with 139 surgery patients who did not

receive a warm-up (*The Lancet*, Sept 2001).

Warmth increases blood circulation, which boosts oxygen supply to the tissues, aiding in repair.

Prewarming is likely to work for many types of surgery. Some US hospitals already keep patients warm. If there's surgery in your immediate future, ask your doctor if your hospital does.

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## ON THE HORIZON

### FASTER SICKLE CELL RELIEF

A study of 249 African-American adults and children with sickle cell disease (SCD), a genetic blood disorder that affects mostly people of African descent, has found that the experimental drug Purified Poloxamer 188 (PP188) shortens the duration of the painful crises associated with the illness (*JAMA*, Nov 7, 2001).

Patients given PP188 experienced pain relief 9 hours sooner than those who took placebos. Children 15 years old and younger had a 21-hour reduction in pain. And adults who took PP188 and the sickle cell drug hydroxyurea suffered 16 fewer hours of pain than patients who got a placebo.

Sickle cell crises occur when the abnormally shaped red blood cells clump together and adhere to the walls of the blood vessels, which causes excruciating pain, explains Eugene P. Orringer, MD, professor of medicine and associate dean at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. PP188 seems to keep the cells from clumping. More studies are planned.

by Judith Springer Riddle