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Aging ... with less ailing

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Posted: Monday, December 9, 2013 12:00 am

By Sam Friedman sfriedman@newsminer.com | 0 comments

FAIRBANKS — Although exercise gets harder as you get older, University of Alaska Fairbanks biology professor Robert Coker made the case that it also becomes especially important for preventing maladies from diabetes to high blood pressure.

Coker spoke about his 2009 research on the effects of exercise and dieting on type two diabetes in older patients to an audience that largely would have fit the age parameters of his research group Wednesday night at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The presentation was part of the weekly research showcase hosted by the Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Activity.

Older people have the deck stacked against them, Coker told his audience.

“With aging, we get more tired our muscles get weaker, our endurance capacity is reduced, we get some muscle wasting,” he said. “It’s coming almost no matter what you do.”

On a flow chart he used in his presentation, the word “aging” led to “weakness” and finally to a series of maladies like “(type two) diabetes,” “hypertension” and “dyslipidemia.”

But aging doesn’t have to cause diabetes, he said. In his research, both dieting and exercise reduced insulin resistance, a condition that is a precursor to type two diabetes. Exercise was most effective, but also becomes more difficult as muscles degenerate.

“You’ve got an opportunity to fill that tank right now but as you get older it’s going to be more and more difficult,” Coker said.

Aging patients who diet to combat insulin resistance face another problem. Dieting can exacerbate sarcopenia, that natural wasting away of the body that accompanies aging. The dieting can help with insulin resistance, but it can also exacerbate muscle loss and make it

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harder to exercise.

Coker's current project is developing a dietary supplement of essential amino acids that can help older patients maintain muscle mass while also losing weight to fight insulin resistance. He took several questions about his synthetic amino acid mix, which has been used for research but is not yet available to the public.

Contact staff writer Sam Friedman at 459-7545. Follow him on Twitter:

@FDNMcrime.

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