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Lecture focuses on the benefits of exercise

Shae Bowman/Sun Star Reporter

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A lecture on the benefits of exercise in the human body as it ages in the Schaible Auditorium on Wednesday, Nov. 4.

Biology and Wildlife Associate Professor Robert Coker hosted the lecture titled "Aging, exercise, and disease prevention."

Coker began the lecture with a picture of a restaurant sign featuring a giant pink Cadillac on top of a post with the word "Dinner" painted across it. Coker and his wife saw the sign while driving from Arkansas to Alaska and he said, "I think it represents what we as begun to go after or what we have become attracted to in the American life style . . . and that is luxury and a poor diet." Throughout the lecture Coker emphasized the importance of striking a balance between luxury, exercise, and healthy eating in daily life.

One of the questions Coker's research has focused on is whether exercise or caloric restriction is better for addressing weight-related health issues. His research found that a combination of both caloric restriction and exercise was most effective for middle aged over-weight people to lose weight. It is also very important for "helping the liver control the glucose system," according to Coker. He also talked about the need to maintain skeletal muscle and build it before age to 45 instead of trying to build it up after that age, once the body really needs it.

"Muscle strength is correlated to all cause mortality. All cause mortality is any natural cause of death. The people who have the highest amount of muscle strength have the lowest all cause mortality," Coker said. Furthermore, he talked about how high muscle strength means a higher likelihood of surviving cancer which "This goes to show how important keeping our muscle as we age is," said Coker. One of the reasons he gave for this correlation is that muscles help the body regulate the metabolism better.

He also talked about the prevalence of Sarcopenia, the loss of muscle. Sarcopenia literally means "poverty of the flesh" and it is correlated with all cause mortality. Coker stated that people over the age of 64 one in four suffer from this loss of muscle. When coupled when obesity it becomes a "clinical conundrum. This is because losing weight also means losing muscle. He said that 50 percent of the weight that is lost can be muscle when you a person has Sarcopenia. However, Coker's research is focusing on developing options for people in this situation. The research group is currently developing a protein formula that will help older people especially build and maintain muscle throughout weight loss.

The lecture ended with several questions from the audience. Dr. Coker came to UAF last April from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Next semester Coker plans to begin teaching the Human Anatomy and Physiology

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