

Physical Activity



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Did you know that four out of five people do not get the recommended amount of physical activity? It's true. Studies have repeatedly shown that physical activity—when combined with healthy eating—results in weight loss and weight maintenance. Most people, however, are still not physically active enough.

Perhaps this is understandable. Unlike the time when physical labor was part of our daily lives, today we use cars, computers, and remote controls more and more. These labor-saving devices have contributed to our modern health problems.

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Health benefits of having an active lifestyle

Physical benefits

- helps replace fat with lean muscle (helping you look more toned)
- increases bone strength
- lowers blood pressure
- lowers risk of heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, hypertension, and some cancers
- increases the level of good cholesterol
- increases heart and lung strength
- improves sleep
- decreases appetite
- burns calories and increases the body's ability to burn fat

Psychological benefits

- builds self-confidence and self-esteem
- reduces emotional stress and depression
- increases alertness
- helps you feel and look your best

Are you ready to include physical activity in your lifestyle?

This information may help you learn about ways to get started . . . whenever you are ready.

Ideas to help you get started

Step 1 Assess where you are now and commit to a small change.

Realistically assess how fit you are now and what you are able to do. Write down a goal for improving your fitness by one small step. Gradually find ways to increase your physical activity.

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Walk or ride a bike instead of driving a car.
- Find something that you enjoy and that is easy for you, such as walking or dancing.
- Find something that you can regularly do at home, like gardening or exercising while watching an aerobics video.
- Find a friend with whom you can take walks.
- Use a step counter (pedometer) to count and record your steps.



You should try to set 30 minutes or more of physical activity on most days. Try exercising for several short periods throughout the day and always exercise in a safe place with good lighting.

Step 2 Make a plan. Make a realistic physical activity goal for the first week or two. Specify exactly what you will do, where you will do it, and the time of day when you will begin.

Step 3 Chart your progress. Keep a record of all the physical activity you get each day. Be sure to include even short bouts of activity.

Step 4 Move to the next level. When you have become comfortable at a certain physical activity level, go back to Step 1 and begin again trying to improve on your personal best. Keep setting new goals and record your successes. One goal may be to exercise longer or to make workouts harder than usual.

Anticipate and prepare for your barriers

“I just can’t find the time.”

- Schedule time for physical activity time the same way you see your doctor or go to a meeting.
- Find time to include several 5-10 minute bouts of exercise into your day.

“Exercise is boring.”

- Vary your activities from day to day.
- Listen to music or the radio.
- Find a partner.

“Exercise is too hard.”

- Choose something easy and enjoyable.
- “I just can’t get motivated.”*
- Find a partner to keep you going.
 - Focus on how good exercise makes you feel. Do you have more energy, feel less stressed, feel more confident, feel stronger, sleep better?

“I’m not good at anything and am afraid of failure.”

- Pick an activity that is not competitive. Avoid comparing yourself to others.

Three essential types of physical activity

There are three essential types of physical activity that should be included in everyone’s program.

Stretching. Stretching muscles improves flexibility, helps prevent injury, and can make overused muscles feel better.

Strengthening. Toning your muscles by lifting weights increases muscle mass and metabolism. Be sure to find out the right way to lift weights to prevent injury.

Aerobics. Performing activities that raise your heart rate and cause you to breathe harder and perspire is important for heart, blood vessels, and lung health. This sort of activity also burns calories, builds endurance, and is good for your mental health, too. Walking, jogging, dancing, and swimming are all excellent aerobic activities.

A word about safety

If you are over 50 years old or have a health problem, talk with your medical professional before beginning any type of physical activity. You will also want to watch how hard you exercise. A good rule to follow is that you should be able to talk during your activity but not be able to sing. If you experience dizziness, faintness, nausea, or chest tightness, stop immediately. Finally, always wear appropriate clothes for the activity and the weather. Light colored clothes, for example, should be worn at night.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of information or medical care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor.