

Physical Activity – Every Move Matters!



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It's official: Exercising is one of the best things you can do for your health. Even small amounts of activity reduce stress, improve your sleep, and lower the risk of many chronic or life-threatening diseases.

You don't have to be an athlete to get the benefits of being active. You can do things that you enjoy and, over time, increase your activity to 30-60 minutes a day.

What are the benefits of physical activity?

Physical activity can:

- replace fat with lean muscle, helping you look more toned
- make your bones stronger
- lower your blood pressure
- lower your risk of heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, hypertension, and some cancers
- increase good cholesterol (HDL)
- make your heart and lungs stronger
- help you sleep better
- burn calories and make it easier for your body to burn fat
- make you more agile and flexible
- help you manage your weight
- build self-confidence and self-esteem
- reduce emotional stress and depression
- make you feel more alert
- help you feel and look your best

Physical activity is good for everyone at every age. It's never too late to start!

How can I get started?

1. Understand where you are now.

How ready are you to make changes in your life to be more physically active?

On a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 means not at all ready and 10 means totally ready), circle your honest answer to that question.

- If your answer is 0-3, what might make you more ready in the future?
- If your answer is 4-6, what are some advantages of staying the same? What are some advantages of changing?
- If your answer is 7-10, congratulations! Your commitment to small changes and healthy choices will help you meet your goals.

2. Commit to a small change.

Look at how active your life is now. Think about ways you might increase that activity by one small step. Here are a few ideas:

- Find an activity that you enjoy and that's easy for you, such as walking or dancing.
- Choose something you can do regularly at home, such as gardening or exercise videos.
- Take walks with a friend or family member.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Walk or ride a bike instead of driving.
- When you drive, park a little further away from your destination.

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- Use a step counter (pedometer) to count your steps. Keep track of them and gradually increase the number of steps you take each day.

3. Make a plan.

Set a realistic goal for the first week or two for the activity you've chosen. Be specific about what you will do, where, and when.

4. Chart your progress.

Keep a record of all your physical activity each day. Be sure to include even short bits of activity, like walking to the mail box.

5. Move on to the next level.

When you become comfortable with a certain activity level, go back to step 1 and raise the bar to improve your personal best. Keep setting new goals and recording your successes. For example, you might set a goal to exercise longer or to make your workouts more vigorous.

Be ready for challenges

Most of us have a hard time adjusting to new routines in our lives. Try these strategies for dealing with challenges.

"I just can't find the time."

- Schedule time for physical activity the same way you schedule appointments or meetings.
- Build activity into your normal day: take the stairs and do errands on foot.
- Break your exercise into 10- or 15-minute sessions instead of one long session.

"Exercise is boring."

- Exercise with a partner.
- Listen to music or watch videos while you work out.
- Do different activities from day to day.

"Exercise is too hard."

- Choose activities you find easy and enjoyable, like swimming.
- Keep a moderate pace. If you can't talk while you're exercising, slow down.

"I can't get motivated."

- Find a supportive partner so you can motivate each other.
- Focus on the positive: Does exercise make you feel better? Do you sleep better or have more energy? Do you feel less stressed, more confident, or stronger?

"I'm not good at exercise. I don't want to embarrass myself."

- Start with something you already know how to do, like walking.
- Choose an activity where you don't have to compete.
- Avoid comparing yourself to others. Creating a healthier life for yourself is what counts.

Three essential types of physical activity

Every exercise program should include:

Stretching. This helps improve flexibility and prevent injury, and it can make overused muscles feel better. Stretch before and after any physical activity.

Strengthening. Toning your muscles by lifting weights increases muscle mass and improves your metabolism. It can also help keep your bones strong. Be sure to learn how to lift weights safely to prevent injury.

Aerobics. Activities that raise your heart rate and make you breathe harder are good for your heart, lungs, and blood vessels. Aerobic activity burns calories, builds endurance, and is good for your mental health, too. Brisk walking, jogging, dancing, and swimming are all excellent choices.

Safety first

- If you have any ongoing health conditions that prevent you from exercising, please check with your doctor before starting a new exercise plan.
- Don't overdo it. Notice how hard you're breathing and keep in mind this rule: You should still be able to talk, but not sing while exercising.
- Start and end each session with some gentle stretches.
- If you get dizzy or faint, feel nausea or tightness in your chest, stop immediately.
- Wear comfortable, sturdy shoes and appropriate clothes for the activity and weather. If you exercise outdoors in the evening, wear light-colored or reflective clothing.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- Visit kp.org/healthyliving for more tips on living a healthy lifestyle.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.