



## Physical Activity for Healthy Weight

### How are physical activity, weight, and health related?

Most people are not active enough. Without enough exercise, we can become tired and unfit. This leaves us feeling unhealthy and less happy. Consider these points:

- Inactive people double their risk of heart disease.
- Inactivity is an important factor in being overweight or obese.
- Obesity is related to illnesses like high blood pressure, diabetes, and arthritis.

### How will physical activity help me?

Regular exercise, combined with a healthy eating program that includes whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, can help you:

- Lower your cholesterol level, blood pressure, and blood sugar level
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- Increase your energy level and stamina
- Sleep better, which can improve your mental alertness
- Reduce stress
- Improve the way you feel overall
- Decrease your risk of getting some illnesses

### I have a busy life--how can I find time to exercise?

The sooner you start being more physically active, the healthier you will feel. So do what you can. You can get most of the healthy changes from physical activity with only 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. You can perform the exercise or activity continuously (for example, from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m.) or break it up throughout the day (for example, 15 minutes at 6:30 a.m., 30 minutes from 12 to 12:30 p.m., and 15 minutes from 8 p.m. to 8:15 p.m.).

### How do I get started?

First, start by just moving around more. Physical activity should be progressive, with the goal of becoming more active. Try the following:

- Using the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator at work or shopping
- Playing actively with your kids
- Parking your car farther away
- Doing your own yard work or gardening

### What's next? What kind of exercise program should I follow?

In addition to increasing your daily physical activity, a regular exercise program, such as taking a walk every day, can improve your fitness at any age. To start an exercise program, choose activities that interest you. Exercise should be fun, not a chore. The more you enjoy your exercise, the more likely you are to stick with your program. Your exercise program should include the following three areas:

- Aerobic activity like walking, jogging, swimming, cycling, hiking, aerobic dance.
- Strength training. This is weight lifting, or other activities that involve working your muscles against resistance.
- Flexibility. This is stretching exercises like yoga.

### How often and how long should I exercise?

Start slowly at first and add more time little by little. Slow progression is the most effective way to prevent muscle injury. Here are some important guidelines to follow:

#### Aerobic activity

- Frequency: Start with 3 to 5 days per week. Add more time or more days slowly after you have developed the exercise habit.
- Intensity: Using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is the least intense and 10 is the most intense, start your exercise program at a level of 3 to 5 (this is a "moderate" level of effort). First increase the length of time you exercise, then increase the level of intensity (how hard you work out during exercise).
- Time: Gradually move up to a goal of 30 to 60 minutes of exercise a day. You can do it all in one exercise period or in several short periods over the course of the day.

## Strength training

- Perform 1 set of 8 to 15 repetitions with a weight that you can comfortably handle and use different exercises that target all the major muscle groups, 2 to 3 days a week.

## Flexibility

Perform these exercises at least 3 days a week.

Don't forget to include warm-up and cool-down with each exercise period. This can be a few minutes of some kind of light activity, such as stretching, before and after the other exercise.

Keep in mind that exercise does not have to be vigorous (of a high intensity) to be good for you. Any increase in physical activity will have good effects on your health. And you are more likely to keep doing moderate-intensity activities than high-intensity activities. This is important because keeping up with physical activity as a lifestyle behavior can help you attain good effects on your health.

## **What can I do to stay with my exercise program?**

- Exercise with a friend or relative. It will help to support each other.
- Set realistic goals. Be reasonable and do what you can. You may even want to do more after you get used to being active.
- Choose times and places that are easy to fit into your life.
- If you like to exercise outdoors, find activities that you can do indoors in case cold or rainy weather keep you inside.
- Include a variety of activities to keep you from getting bored.
- Keep an exercise log. A diary will help you keep track of your activity.
- Expect relapses. If you become bored, take a few days off. Think about what you could do to keep yourself interested in exercising. Remember, you are only taking a short break to refresh your program.
- Pat yourself on the back for a job well done. Remind yourself every week of the benefits of physical activity.

## **Where can I learn more about physical fitness?**

American College of Sports Medicine

Telephone: 1-317-637-9200

Web address: [www.acsm.org](http://www.acsm.org)

The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability

Telephone: 1-800-900-8086

Web address: [www.ncpad.org](http://www.ncpad.org)

President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

Telephone: 1-202-690-9000

Web address: [www.fitness.gov](http://www.fitness.gov)

Contact your local Parks &

Recreation Department for activities in your area.

American Council on Exercise

Telephone: 1-800-825-3636

Web address: [www.acefitness.org](http://www.acefitness.org)

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Ask your doctor before starting an exercise program that is more vigorous than walking if you:

- Are a man older than 45 or a woman older than 55.
- Have heart disease or two or more cardiac risk factors like high blood pressure, cigarette smoking, or diabetes.

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This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

Visit [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org) for information on this and many other health-related topics.

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