

Physical Activity... A healthy habit for Life!

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“The good news...is that people can benefit from even moderate levels of physical activity.”

Surgeon General of the United States.

Years ago staying active was not an issue. But today, in our world of technology and new conveniences, most of the physical activity has been taken out of our lives. Most Americans (about 60%) no longer break a sweat on a daily basis. This lack of physical activity is having a profoundly negative effect on the health of children and adults.

Scientists recently looked at the underlying causes of all of the deaths in the United States in 2002 (excluding genetic causes). They found that a combination of lack of exercise and poor dietary habits was the second largest underlying cause of death, with smoking being the largest. Regular physical activity could prevent disease or improve the health of Americans who suffer from the following illnesses:

- 61 million people (one-fourth of the population) have cardiovascular disease.
- 16 million people have adult-onset (non-insulin-dependent) diabetes.
- 140,000 people diagnosed with colon cancer each year.
- 50 million people have high blood pressure.
- Over 57 percent of adults are overweight or obese.



Physical Activity for Good Health

The best reason to routinely include physical activity in your everyday life is that you genuinely want to improve your health and fitness. Most Americans are surprised at the amount of evidence that links regular physical activity to health improvement. Regular physical activity improves health in the following ways:

Reduces the risk of premature death:

Low physical fitness = a shorter life span

Reduces the risk of dying prematurely from heart disease:

- Decreases blood triglyceride levels
- Decreases low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol—the “bad” cholesterol
- Increases high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol—the “good” cholesterol

Reduces the risk of developing diseases:

- One in four older adults is at risk of developing Type 2 diabetes (adult-onset, non-insulin-dependent diabetes)
- Studies show regular exercise enhances the body’s ability to use insulin (a hormone that regulates the body’s use of blood sugar)
- Prevents or delays the risk of developing high blood pressure.
- Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer.

Helps build and maintain strong bones, muscles, and joints:

- Osteoporosis, in which the bones become more fragile with time, occurs most commonly in older women, but is also found in men.
- Weight-bearing exercise, such as walking and jogging, helps to maintain bone density.

Promotes psychological well-being:

- Enhances self-image and sense of well-being
- Improves quality of sleep, making one more resistant to fatigue
- Lessens depression, stress, and anxiety
- Improves outlook on life

Improves physical appearance

- Tones muscles
- Helps control weight
- Helps control appetite

What is Physical Fitness?

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) defines physical fitness as the ability of your heart, blood vessels, lungs, and muscles to carry out daily tasks and occasional, unplanned bodily challenges with a minimum of fatigue and discomfort. In other words — having the energy to do all you want to do! Physical fitness requires a lifetime commitment.

The difference between physical activity and exercise is that physical activity is any voluntary body movement that burns calories. Exercise is physical activity that follows a planned format. The movements are repeated, with a goal of improving or maintaining one or more specific areas of physical fitness.



There are four components to physical fitness:

1. Aerobic fitness involves endurance activities that ...

- Increase your heart rate and breathing for an extended period of time.
- Involve the body’s ability to take in and use oxygen to produce energy
- Use large muscle groups
- Include jogging, brisk walking, swimming and bicycling

2. Muscular fitness – involves strength training, resistance training, weight training, or weight lifting activities that...

- Build muscular strength and endurance
- Help preserve lean body mass
- Challenge muscles with resistance to make them stronger

3. Flexibility – stretching activities that...

- Bend joints and stretch muscles through a full range of motion
- Help to prevent strains and may help prevent falls in the elderly.
- Include Tai Chi, Yoga, bowling, and yardwork

4. Body composition – comparison of fat tissue to other body tissue.

- Not based on how much you weigh but on how much of your weight is body fat.
- Excessive body fat can cause musculoskeletal problems and increase your risk of heart disease and high blood pressure.

“Every U.S. adult should accumulate 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.”

This is the recommendation of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the American College of Sports Medicine.

Research has shown that everyday physical activities can accomplish some of the same goals as exercise with less of the negativity sometimes associated with exercise. Best of all, you don't have to do all your physical activity at one time - ten minutes here - five minutes there. A little bit of activity throughout the day is just as beneficial as thirty minutes at one time. Remember, the goal is to accumulate thirty minutes or more of moderate activity each day. Try these suggestions:

- Take the stairs instead of the elevators.
- Park as far from the door as you can.

- Walk around the outside aisles of the store at least once before starting your shopping.
- Walk or march in place as you talk on the phone or watch TV.

The U.S. Surgeon General reports that you are more likely to stick with doing your physical activity if you:

- Think you will benefit from your activity.
- Do activities you enjoy.
- Can do the activities on a regular basis.
- Can fit the activities into your schedule.
- Feel that the activities don't impose a financial or social cost you aren't willing to pay.
- Have few negative consequences from doing your activity (negative peer pressure, lost time or injury).

Examples of Endurance Activities

Moderate

Walking briskly (2 miles in 30 minutes)
Swimming
Bicycling
Mopping or scrubbing floors
Golf, without cart
Dancing
Tennis (doubles)
Gardening for 30-45 minutes
Wheeling self in wheelchair 30-40 minutes
Jumping rope for 15 minutes
Pushing stroller 1.5 miles in 30 minutes

Vigorous

Climbing stairs or hills
Swimming laps
Brisk bicycling up hills
Hiking
Jogging
Shoveling snow
Tennis (singles)

References

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Weekly Activity Record

Use the following weekly activity chart to help follow your daily physical activity level. Write the activity performed in the first block next to the day of the week (example - walked). In the next box write what you would have done before increasing your activity level (example - taken the elevator). In the next box write what you did to increase your activity level (example - walk up one flight of stairs). Record minutes spent on activity.

Endurance Activity	What I normally would have done	What I did to increase my activity level
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		