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Get moving...

For the health and fun of it!

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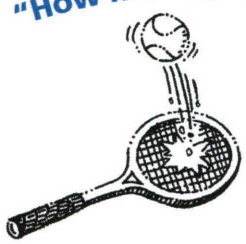
DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS



"How much physical activity do I need?"

"Do I need special equipment?"

"How can I find time for exercise?"

Putting the Guidelines into Practice

October 2003

Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion
United States Department of Agriculture

Home and Garden Bulletin No. 267-5

Is physical activity part of your life? This brochure will help you understand what physical activity can do for you, how much you need, and how to fit it into your busy lifestyle.

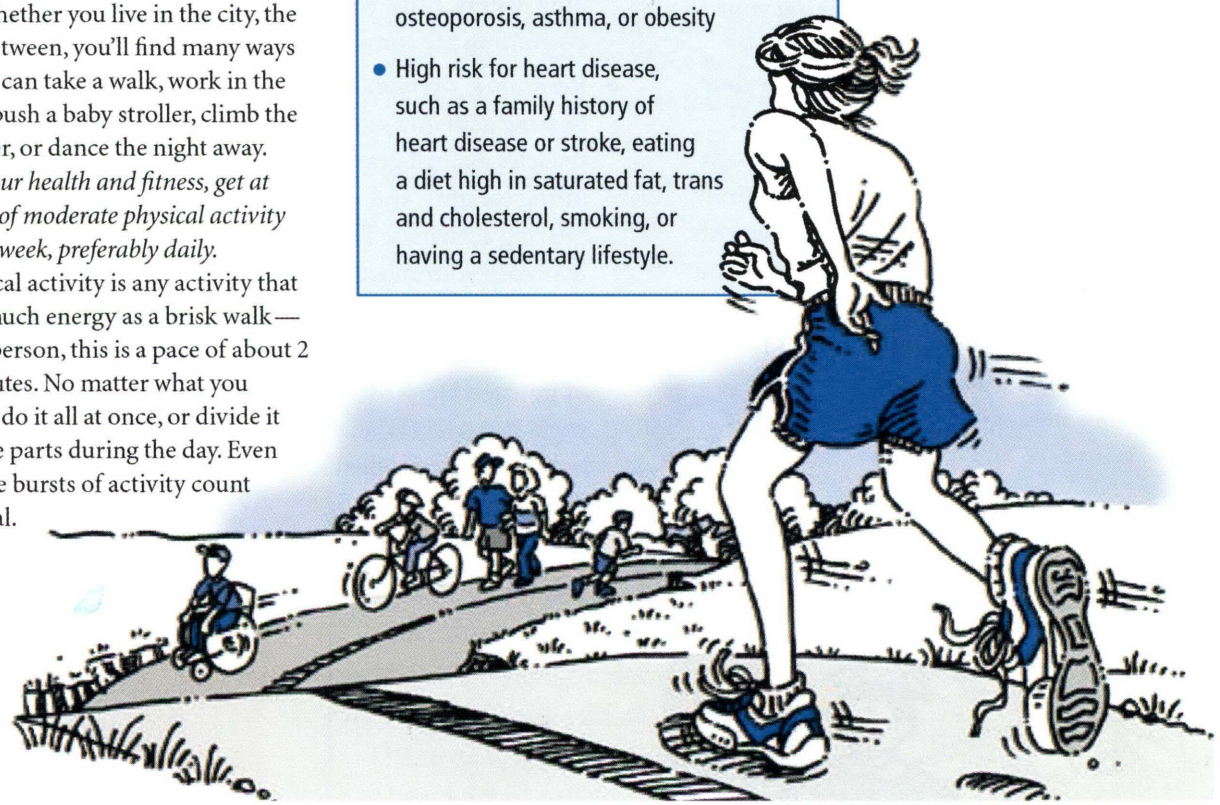
Are you physically active?

Physical activity is a good way to improve your health and have fun. You may think of physical activity as exercise and special equipment—actually, it means *moving your body*. Look around; whether you live in the city, the country, or in between, you'll find many ways to be active. You can take a walk, work in the garden, briskly push a baby stroller, climb the stairs, play soccer, or dance the night away.

To improve your health and fitness, get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily. Moderate physical activity is any activity that takes about as much energy as a brisk walk—for the average person, this is a pace of about 2 miles in 30 minutes. No matter what you choose, you can do it all at once, or divide it into two or three parts during the day. Even small, 10-minute bursts of activity count toward your total.

Most adults do not need to see their health care provider before increasing their activity level. However, you should consult your health care provider before starting a vigorous activity program if you are over age 40 (men) or 50 (women) or have one or more of the conditions below:

- A chronic health problem such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, asthma, or obesity
- High risk for heart disease, such as a family history of heart disease or stroke, eating a diet high in saturated fat, trans and cholesterol, smoking, or having a sedentary lifestyle.



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Reasons to get moving

Physical activity helps relieve stress and makes you feel good. It will help you be more productive and sleep better. Physical activity is also good for your health. It helps you achieve and maintain fitness and lowers your chronic disease risk. Being active for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week will reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. Box 1 lists some benefits of physical activity.

Box 1. Benefits of physical activity

- Makes you feel good
- Increases your fitness level
- Helps build and maintain bones, muscles, and joints
- Builds endurance and muscle strength
- Enhances flexibility and posture
- Helps manage weight
- Lowers risk of heart disease, colon cancer, and Type II diabetes
- Helps control blood pressure
- Improves self-esteem and feeling of well-being
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety

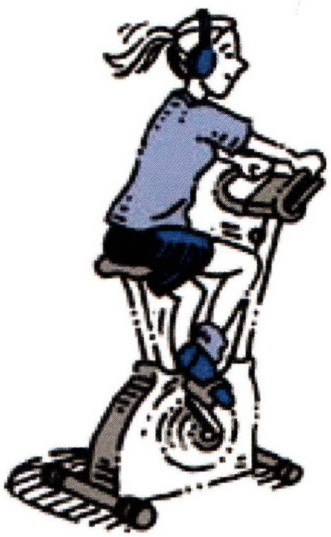
Make physical activity a regular part of your day

Choose activities that you enjoy and can do regularly. You can fit them into your daily routine by walking to and from the parking lot, bus stop, or subway station, or taking extra trips up and down the stairs. Or, maybe an exercise class would work best for you.

Be creative. Keep it interesting by trying something different on alternate days. What's important is to be active most days of the week and make it part of your lifestyle. For example, you may already be walking your dog for 10 minutes before and after work. Add a short walk at lunchtime to reach your 30-minute goal for the day. Or, how about swimming 3 times a week and taking a yoga class on the other days? Get the whole family involved—enjoy an afternoon bike ride with your kids. Be ready for activity wherever you are. Keep some comfortable clothes and a pair of walking or running shoes in your car and office. Box 2 lists some activities to consider.

Some types of physical activity are especially beneficial:

- *Aerobic activities*—speed up your heart rate and breathing. They improve heart and lung fitness. Brisk walking, jogging, and swimming are some aerobic activities.
- *Resistance, strength building, and weight-bearing activities*—work your bones and muscles against gravity. Carrying a child, lifting weights, and walking are all weight-bearing activities. They help to build and maintain your muscles and bones.
- *Balance and stretching activities*—enhance your physical stability and reduce your risk of injuries. Gentle stretching, dancing, yoga, martial arts, and T'ai Chi can increase both balance and flexibility and help you relax, too.



Physical activity and nutrition

Physical activity and nutrition work together for better health. Being active increases the amount of calories you burn. As we age our metabolism slows, so we have to move more and eat less to maintain our energy balance.

Physical activity and weight management

Physical activity can help you lose weight and keep it off. The amount of physical activity needed will vary depending on many factors such as age, weight, eating habits, and lifestyle. If you are not physically active and want to lose weight, start with 30 or more minutes of moderate activity each day. You may need more than 30 minutes of moderate activity each day to lose and then maintain your weight loss.

Help children be active

Children and adolescents benefit from activity, too. It is recommended that they get at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity every day. Here are some tips to help children be active:

- Set a good example. Arrange active family events in which everyone takes part. Join your children's activities—then, everyone wins.
- Encourage your children to be active by jumping rope, playing tag, riding a bike, or dancing.
- Support your children's participation in school or community sports or classes, as well as individual sports.
- Limit television watching, computer games, and other inactive forms of play by alternating them with periods of activity.

Box 2. Try one or more of these activities to get you moving...

Check off activities that you do or could start to do.

At home:

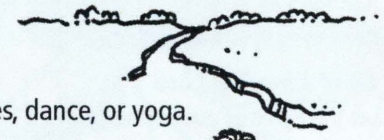
- ❑ Join a walking group in your neighborhood or at the local shopping mall. Recruit a partner for support and encouragement.
- ❑ Push your baby in a stroller—let your toddler help you.
- ❑ Walk up and down the soccer or softball field sidelines while you watch the kids play.
- ❑ Walk the dog—don't just watch the dog walk.
- ❑ Clean the house or wash your car.
- ❑ Walk, skate, or cycle more, and drive less.
- ❑ Do stretches, exercises, or pedal a stationary bike while watching television.
- ❑ Mow the lawn with a push mower.
- ❑ Plant and care for a vegetable or flower garden.
- ❑ Play with your children—tumble in the leaves, build a snowman, splash in a puddle, or dance to your favorite music.
- ❑ _____ (add your own idea)

At work:

- ❑ Get off the bus or subway one stop early and walk or skate the rest of the way.
- ❑ Climb the stairs instead of taking the elevator.
- ❑ Replace your coffee break with a brisk 10-minute walk. Ask a friend to go with you.
- ❑ Take part in an exercise program at your workplace or a nearby gym.
- ❑ Join the office softball or bowling team.
- ❑ _____ (add your own idea)

At play:

- ❑ Walk, jog, skate, or cycle.
- ❑ Swim or do water aerobics.
- ❑ Take a class in martial arts, pilates, dance, or yoga.
- ❑ Golf (pull cart or carry clubs).
- ❑ Canoe, row, or kayak.
- ❑ Play racquetball, tennis, or squash.
- ❑ Ski cross-country or downhill.
- ❑ Play basketball, softball, or soccer.
- ❑ Hand cycle or play wheelchair sports.
- ❑ Take a nature walk.
- ❑ _____ (add your own idea)



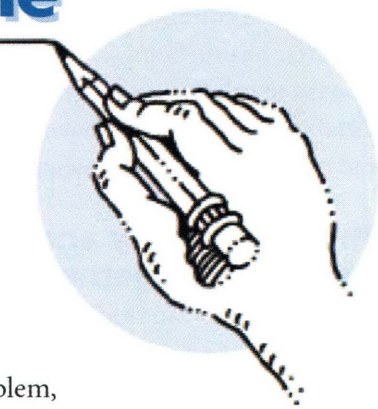
Most important... have fun while you move!

For older Americans...

You're never too old to benefit from regular physical activity. There are many activities that you can do at any age. Staying strong and flexible has important benefits. It can help to:

- Reduce your risk of falls and broken bones.
- Preserve your muscle and joint stability.
- Improve your ability to live independently.

The Bottom Line



- Get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most, preferably all, days of the week.
- If you are inactive, become active.
- If you are already active, maintain or increase your activity level.
- If you are over age 40 (men) and 50 (women) or have a chronic health problem, see a health care provider before increasing your activity level.
- Help children get at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity daily.
- Choose activities, recreational events, or structured programs that fit into your lifestyle.
- Stay active throughout your life and have fun!

Dietary Guidelines for Americans

The Dietary Guidelines offer sound advice that will help to promote your health and reduce your risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease, certain cancers, diabetes, stroke, and osteoporosis. The 10 Guidelines are grouped into the ABC's of nutrition:

DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS

A: Aim for fitness

- Aim for a healthy weight.
- Be physically active each day.

B: Build a healthy base

- Let the Pyramid guide your food choices.
- Choose a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains.
- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Keep food safe to eat.

C: Choose sensibly

- Choose a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol and moderate in total fat.
- Choose beverages and foods to moderate your intake of sugars.
- Choose and prepare foods with less salt.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

To order Dietary Guidelines publications, call 888-878-3256. Ask for the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (40-page bulletin, $4.75 per copy) or *Using the Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (5-panel brochure, $.50 per copy).

You can also find out more about the Guidelines and download these publications by visiting USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion website at www.cnpp.usda.gov.

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