

# Physical Activity Fact Sheet

## Why is physical activity important?

Regular physical activity can produce long term health benefits. People of all ages, shapes, sizes, and abilities can benefit from being physically active. The more physical activity you do, the greater the health benefits.

### Being physically active can help you:

- Increase your chances of living longer
- Feel better about yourself
- Decrease your chances of becoming depressed
- Sleep well at night
- Move around more easily
- Have stronger muscles and bones
- Stay at or get to a healthy weight
- Be with friends or meet new people
- Enjoy yourself and have fun



### When you are *not* physically active, you are more likely to:

- Get heart disease
- Get type 2 diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have high blood cholesterol
- Have a stroke

Physical activity and nutrition work together for better health. Being active increases the amount of calories burned. As people age their metabolism slows, so maintaining energy balance requires moving more and eating less.

### Some types of physical activity are especially beneficial:

- *Aerobic activities* make you breathe harder and make your heart beat faster. Aerobic activities can be moderate or vigorous in their intensity. Vigorous activities take more effort than moderate ones. For **moderate activities**, you can talk while you do them, but you can't sing. For **vigorous activities**, you can only say a few words without stopping to catch your breath.
- *Muscle-strengthening activities* make your muscles stronger. These include activities like push-ups and lifting weights. It is important to work all the different parts of the body — your legs, hips, back, chest, stomach, shoulders, and arms.
- *Bone-strengthening activities* make your bones stronger. Bone strengthening activities, like jumping, are especially important for children and adolescents. These activities produce a force on the bones that promotes bone growth and strength.
- *Balance and stretching activities* enhance physical stability and flexibility, which reduces risk of injuries. Examples are gentle stretching, dancing, yoga, martial arts, and t'ai chi.

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## How much physical activity is needed?

Physical activity is important for everyone, but how much you need depends on your age.

### **ADULTS (18 to 64 years)**

Adults should do at least 2 hours and 30 minutes each week of aerobic physical activity at a moderate level OR 1 hour and 15 minutes each week of aerobic physical activity at a vigorous level. Being active 5 or more hours each week can provide even more health benefits. Spreading aerobic activity out over at least 3 days a week is best. Also, each activity should be done for at least 10 minutes at a time. Adults should also do strengthening activities, like push-ups, sit-ups and lifting weights, at least 2 days a week.

### **CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS (6-17 years)**

Children and adolescents should do 60 minutes or more of physical activity each day. Most of the 60 minutes should be either moderate- or vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity, and should include vigorous-intensity physical activity at least 3 days a week. As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include muscle-strengthening activities, like climbing, at least 3 days a week and bone-strengthening activities, like jumping, at least 3 days a week. Children and adolescents are often active in short bursts of time rather than for sustained periods of time, and these short bursts can add up to meet physical activity needs. Physical activities for children and adolescents should be developmentally-appropriate, fun, and offer variety.

### **YOUNG CHILDREN (2-5 years)**

There is not a specific recommendation for the number of minutes young children should be active each day. Children ages 2-5 years should play actively several times each day. Their activity may happen in short bursts of time and not be all at once. Physical activities for young children should be developmentally-appropriate, fun, and offer variety.

**Physical activity is generally safe for everyone.** The health benefits you gain from being active are far greater than the chances of getting hurt. Here are some things you can do to stay safe while you are active:

- If you haven't been active in a while, start slowly and build up.
- Learn about the types and amounts of activity that are right for you.
- Choose activities that are appropriate for your fitness level.
- Build up the time you spend before switching to activities that take more effort.
- Use the right safety gear and sports equipment.
- Choose a safe place to do your activity.
- See a health care provider if you have a health problem.

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## How many calories does physical activity use?

A 154-pound man (5' 10") will use up about the number of calories listed doing each activity below. **Those who weigh more will use more calories, and those who weigh less will use fewer.** The calorie values listed include both calories used by the activity and the calories used for normal body functioning.

Moderate physical activities:	Approximate calories used by a 154 pound man	
	In 1 hour	In 30 minutes
Hiking	370	185
Light gardening/yard work	330	165
Dancing	330	165
Golf (walking and carrying clubs)	330	165
Bicycling (less than 10 miles per hour)	290	145
Walking (3 ½ miles per hour)	280	140
Weight training (general light workout)	220	110
Stretching	180	90
Vigorous physical activities:	In 1 hour	In 30 minutes
Running/jogging (5 miles per hour)	590	295
Bicycling (more than 10 miles per hour)	590	295
Swimming (slow freestyle laps)	510	255
Aerobics	480	240
Walking (4 ½ miles per hour)	460	230
Heavy yard work (chopping wood)	440	220
Weight lifting (vigorous effort)	440	220
Basketball (vigorous)	440	220

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## Tips for increasing physical activity

### Make physical activity a regular part of the day

Choose activities that you enjoy and can do regularly. Fitting activity into a daily routine can be easy — such as taking a brisk 10 minute walk to and from the parking lot, bus stop, or subway station. Or, join an exercise class. Keep it interesting by trying something different on alternate days. Every little bit adds up and doing something is better than doing nothing. Make sure to do at least 10 minutes of activity at a time, shorter bursts of activity will not have the same health benefits. For example, walking the dog for 10 minutes before and after work or adding a 10 minute walk at lunchtime can add to your weekly goal. Mix it up. Swim, take a yoga class, garden or lift weights. To be ready anytime, keep some comfortable clothes and a pair of walking or running shoes in the car and at the office.



### More ways to increase physical activity

#### At home:

- Join a walking group in the neighborhood or at the local shopping mall. Recruit a partner for support and encouragement.  
Push the baby in a stroller.
- Get the whole family involved — enjoy an afternoon bike ride with your kids.
- Walk up and down the soccer or softball field sidelines while watching the kids play.
- Walk the dog — don't just watch the dog walk.
- Clean the house or wash the 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 the kids — tumble in the leaves, build a snowman, splash in a puddle, or dance to favorite music.
- Exercise to a workout video.



#### At work:

- Get off the bus or subway one stop early and walk or skate the rest of the way.
- Replace a coffee break with a brisk 10-minute walk. Ask a friend to go with you.
- Take part in an exercise program at work or a nearby gym.
- Join the office softball team or walking group.

