Exercise to Stay Healthy

Why should I exercise?

Exercise has many physical benefits. It can:
- Increase your strength and energy
- Help you maintain a healthy weight or lose excess body fat
- Help keep your bones strong throughout your lifetime and reduce arthritis pain
- Lower your blood pressure
- Lower your total blood cholesterol
- Lower your blood sugar
- Help you sleep

These physical effects decrease the risk of stroke, heart disease, and diabetes.

Exercise can also have emotional benefits, such as:
- Lifting your mood when you feel down
- Improving how you feel about yourself
- Reducing stress and anxiety

What kinds of exercise are best for me?

Warming up and cooling down
- Muscles that are warmed-up before exercise are more flexible and less likely to be injured. Brisk walking, easy jogging, or jumping jacks are good ways to get your muscles warm and ready to go.
- After your muscles are warmed up, you may also want to stretch. Some people feel better if they stretch before and after exercise. Stretching after exercise is more important than stretching before exercise. It decreases the risk for being sore or injured.
- When you are ready to stop, cool down by gradually slowing your activity.

Aerobic exercise
- Aerobic exercise increases your breathing and heart rate. This is important because it helps keep your heart and lungs healthy. Examples include walking, swimming, riding a bike, and dancing. Most team sports are aerobic. Being part of a team sport will give you a chance to exercise several times a week. Tennis, hockey, rowing, soccer, basketball, volleyball, and cross-country running are all good examples of aerobic sports. But, you need to do them briskly so that your heart and breathing rate go up.
- A healthy goal is to exercise for 2 hours and 30 minutes or more each week, in addition to your regular activities. You don't need to do 30 minutes of activity all at once. You can do shorter periods, at least 10 minutes each time. Aim for a moderate level of effort that lets you talk while moving, but without getting out of breath.

Strengthening

- Exercise to strengthen all of your major muscle groups (legs, back, chest, belly, and arms) is recommended for most people. It includes weight lifting, stair stepping, carrying groceries, doing sit-ups or push-ups, and exercising with large elastic bands. When you work your muscles, they get stronger and you are able to work longer without getting tired. Stomach muscles support the back, so strengthening this area is really important. Muscle mass burns more calories than fat, so as your muscle increases, so does your ability to burn calories.
- A healthy goal is to do strengthening exercises on 2 days each week (skip at least one day in between). Repeat each exercise several times, then take a short break before doing the exercise again, or do a different exercise.

Flexibility

- Flexibility exercises can help you move about more easily. Being flexible makes it easier to do many activities and also decreases your risk for getting hurt. Flexibility exercises help you use the full range of motion of your joints. Examples include stretching, yoga, and tai chi.
- All ages can benefit from stretching. Always do stretching exercises after a warm up activity.

How do I choose the exercise that is best for me?

Think about your style. Do you like organized activities or exercising on your own? What kind of program fits your schedule? Do you need someone or something to help motivate you? If so, sign up for a class or work out with a friend or family member. Do something you enjoy. If you choose something you don't really like, you won't stick with it. To avoid getting burned out, do a variety of activities. Include some strength training, some aerobic exercise, and some stretching.

If you would like to exercise, but would rather get in shape in private, there are some good options. You can:

- Buy exercise equipment to use at home.
- Take lessons from a personal trainer at a health club or recreation center.
- Use exercise videos, DVDs, and CDs. Try to choose those that have instructors with degrees in fitness or exercise physiology. Not all instructors put safety first.

If you haven't been active lately, your goal is to get started doing something physical every day. Give your lungs, heart, and muscles time to adjust by starting slowly. If you are severely overweight or you have other physical problems, ask your healthcare provider about ways to exercise safely and comfortably without hurting yourself.

What else can I do to improve my health with exercise?

- Before trying a new activity, learn how to do it safely first. A personal trainer can help you create an exercise plan and teach you how to do each activity safely.
- Start slow and increase your activity over time. Think of a 10-point scale, where 0 is sitting and doing nothing and 10 is the most activity that you have ever done. Aim for activity that is a 5 or 6 for you.
- Sneak in more activity into your everyday activities. For example, take the stairs instead of the elevator. Get on or off of the bus several blocks away. Every little bit helps. Take time for a short walk or bike ride a few times during the day.
- Pay attention to how you feel and don't overdo it. If you can't talk while doing your activity, you are working too hard. Ask your healthcare provider what symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them.
- Always drink water before, during, and after exercise.
- Limit how much time you spend watching television, chatting on the computer, or playing video games. These activities are all fun and you don't have to give them up, but don't let them take the place of physical activities.

Developed by RelayHealth.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.