

Exercise and Weight Control

What are the benefits of 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
- 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

What type of exercise program is best for me?

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. Your provider may also refer you to a dietitian to plan your diet. A dietitian can teach you how to make healthier food choices and fix meals that fit your diet needs. The goal of most diet and exercise plans is to help you lose 1 to 2 pounds a week.

To slowly increase your physical activity, your provider may suggest that you:

- Walk every day.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park farther away, or get off the bus one stop early and walk.
- Go to a spa, gym, or exercise class. Water aerobic classes are good if you have back, knee, or joint problems. Yoga classes can also be helpful.

Walking is a great way for almost everyone to increase the amount of time they exercise. Using a pedometer can be fun and motivating. A pedometer is a device that attaches to your clothing and tracks how many steps you take in a day. A good goal is to work up to 10,000 steps a day (5 miles). If your provider agrees, try increasing your steps each week by 500 a day until you reach 10,000 steps a day.

As you exercise more, keep these guidelines in mind:

- Choose activities you enjoy, can afford, and can fit into your schedule. Your goal is to make physical activity a part of your life.

- Get ideas from a chart that shows how many calories are burned in different physical activities.
- Consider bicycling, walking briskly, or exercising at home with videotapes if you don't like sports or gyms. You can get exercise videos and DVDs for all levels of fitness, including people with disabilities. You can borrow them from your library, view them on Web sites, or buy them at stores or on line.
- Build up slowly to a level of activity that makes you breathe more heavily, increases your heart rate, and makes you sweat. Do not do so much that you strain your muscles or feel dizzy or sick to your stomach.
- A good exercise goal is to build up to at least 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) a week of moderate exercise, or 1 hour and 15 minutes (75 minutes) a week of vigorous activity. Mix moderate and vigorous activities during the week to keep it interesting.
 - Try to exercise for at least 10 minutes at a time and spread your total workout time over the week. It helps to try for 30 or 40 minutes per day, 4 or 5 times a week rather than try to do too much all at once.
 - **Moderate exercise** means you're working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat. One way to tell is that you'll be able to talk, but not sing. Examples of moderate exercise are walking fast (a 15 minute mile), doing water aerobics, or playing basketball.
 - **Vigorous activity** means you're breathing hard and fast, and your heart rate has gone up quite a bit. If you're working at this level, you won't be able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath. Examples of activities that require vigorous effort are jogging, swimming laps, or playing singles tennis.
 - If you want to lose weight, and your healthcare provider approves, get at least 5 hours (300 minutes) of moderate exercise or 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of vigorous activity a week. This will also help you keep a healthy weight once you reach your goal.
- Do some form of strength training using gym equipment or your own body weight 2 or more days a week. The exercises should work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms). Strength training will make your muscles stronger and able to work longer without getting tired. Muscle burns more calories than fat so as your muscle increases, so does your ability to burn calories.
- Do warm-up exercises or gentle stretches before exercising. Do cool-down exercises afterward.
- Wear proper shoes and loose-fitting clothing.
- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals that provide the right amount of calories in your diet for you to have the energy to exercise and keep a healthy weight. Drink extra water or sports drinks such as Gatorade when you exercise vigorously or in hot weather.
- Be sure to check with your healthcare provider before starting your exercise program.

To maintain your exercise program:

- Don't expect to get in shape in a week or two. Start out slowly and build habits that can last a lifetime.
- Find a friend to exercise with you.
- Recover completely from illness or injury before going back to exercise. Then start with less exercise and increase a little at a time to avoid injury.
- Make exercise is part of your life. Don't try to be too intense. Enjoy getting healthy and staying in shape.

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