

Exercise for the Apparently Healthy, Inactive Person



Most Americans do not exercise enough on a regular basis. Only 30 percent of Americans are active at any time. Of those, about half are regularly active. The other half only recently became active. They replaced those who recently stopped being active. Inactivity increases the risk of dying from all causes, especially from cardiovascular and metabolic diseases. What's the solution?



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What if there was an inexpensive prescription with few negative side effects? What if it could prevent and treat dozens of diseases? What if it could even improve the quality of your life? Would you take it?

That prescription is exercise! There is strong evidence that regular physical activity can:

- **prevent** type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and some cancers (colon, prostate, and breast).
- **treat** type 2 diabetes and some blood lipid disorders.
- **prevent and treat** heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and obesity and its associated problems.
- **delay** the effects of aging.
- **improve** functional capacity and psychological well-being at any age.

In America, too many people also are overweight or obese. Regular physical activity helps manage weight. Despite your body weight or the amount of weight lost, though, exercise will improve your overall health.

How much exercise do you need? The most health benefit comes when inactive people become moderately active. Try to work up to 150 minutes a week brisk walking. Making exercise a regular part of your life can have a major impact on your health. The key is to choose activities that involve most major muscle groups (walking, cycling, and swimming). Also, pick ones you enjoy and will do regularly.

Evidence suggests both aerobic and muscle-strengthening exercise programs help. So try to do both. If you are just starting out, do more aerobic exercise. Over time, add resistance workouts. Doing both types will bring even more benefits for overall health and fitness.

Getting Started

- Talk with your doctor before you start an exercise program. Ask about any changes to your medications or any concerns in becoming more active.
- Take all medicines prescribed by your doctor.
- Begin slowly and carefully. This is especially important the older, less fit, and more inactive you are.
- Commit to at least three months of regular physical activity. In this period, you should see improvements in your health and fitness. Feel like you don't have enough time to exercise? Remember, exercise is one of the most important things you can do for your health.
- Start by exercising on your own. Begin walking or another form of activity that you can integrate into your daily routine.
- Invite others to join you. Exercising together is more fun and increases the chance you will continue. Dogs also make great walking partners!
- Look for programs available in your community. Consider contacting an appropriately credentialed exercise professional* to help you. All you really need, though, is a good pair of shoes to get started walking.
- Use a pedometer or other activity tracker to monitor your progress. Slowly work toward a goal, like maybe 10,000 steps per day.

Aerobic Exercise Programs

The American College of Sports Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity, or a combination of both for adults. They also suggest twice-a-week muscle strengthening. Follow the FITT principle to design and implement a safe, effective, and enjoyable program. F = frequency, I = intensity, T = time, and T = type (Pescatello et al., 2013).

- Frequency – Be active on most days of the week but at least three to four days. Work up to five days a week.
- Intensity – Exercise at a moderate level. Use the “talk test” to help you monitor. For example, even though you may notice a slight rise in your heart rate and breathing, you should be able to carry on a conversation while walking at a moderate pace. As you walk faster, you will begin to breathe faster and have difficulty talking. At that point, you’ve achieved moderate intensity or “somewhat hard.” Vigorous exercise causes a large rise in heart rate and breathing. At this intensity it would become difficult to talk. Most people would rate this as “hard to very hard.”
- Time – Exercise 30-60 minutes per day. You can do it all at once or break it up into a few sessions of at least 10 minutes each.
- Type – Do rhythmic exercises using the large muscle groups. Try brisk walking, cycling, and swimming. Choose activities you enjoy and will do regularly in your new, more active lifestyle. Add variety depending on the day or the season to keep your program more enjoyable.

Aerobic Exercise Cautions

- If you have been inactive for a long time, start with short sessions (10 to 15 minutes). Add five minutes to each session, increasing every two to four weeks. Gradually build up to being active at least 30 minutes a day for most days of the week.
- If you exercise at a high intensity, you will not be able to exercise for a long time. That means you will use less total energy. Also, you have a higher risk of injury.
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after exercise. Be careful not to overdo it. Extra weight can make your body overheat more easily.

Resistance Exercise Programs

Evidence suggests that moderate-intensity resistance training also improves your ability to function, promotes good health, and improves your strength. It also helps increase or maintain the amount of muscle you have as you lose weight. Follow the FITT principal when creating a resistance exercise program, too.

- Frequency – Do resistance training at least two days per week. Plan a day of rest between sessions.
- Intensity – Exercise at a moderate level. If you can lift a weight 10 to 15 times, you’ve achieved moderate intensity. You get to high intensity when you can lift a weight only eight to ten times. Remember, you aren’t training to be a weight lifter. Your goal is to improve your strength and muscle endurance so your daily activities will be less stressful.
- Time – This will depend on the number of exercises you do.
- Type – Exercise all major muscle groups using either free weights or a machine. There is no difference between the two methods. Don’t belong to a gym or health club? No problem. You can do the same exercises at home using lighter weights, resistance bands, or your body weight as the resistance, like push-ups or sit-ups.

Resistance Exercise Cautions

- Avoid holding your breath when lifting. This can cause large changes in blood pressure. That change may increase the risk of passing out or developing abnormal heart rhythms.
- If you have joint problems or other health problems, do only one set for all major muscle groups. Start with 10 to 15 repetitions. Build up to 15 to 20 repetitions before you add another set.

Design your exercise program for maximum benefit and minimum risk to your health and physical condition. Consider reaching out to an appropriately credentialed exercise professional* to work with you and your doctor. Together, you can establish realistic goals and design a safe, effective, and enjoyable program.

For more information, visit www.exerciseismedicine.org or e-mail eim@acsm.org.

*A listing of exercise professionals can be found at www.usreps.org and EIM Credentialed professionals can be found through the ACSM ProFinder (<http://bit.ly/1Mq6ldN>).

Referral Instructions