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Get Moving and Stay Healthy Make Physical Activity Part of Your Life

Those busy with work and school, two-career couples, single parents—really, whoever you are, people from all walks of life find it difficult to get enough exercise. But research shows that all Americans need physical activity for good health. New government guidelines can help you get started and stay active.

The government recently released the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* to help you live longer, feel better and help yourself and the country. “We have a crisis in health care funding in this country,” says Acting Surgeon General Dr. Steven Galson. “We need to make sure that we’re doing everything possible as a nation to keep our population healthy, not just because it’ll help people fulfill their goals for themselves, but also because of the financial crunch facing the country in health care.”

Regular physical activity improves your overall health and fitness. It can help reduce high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and other risk factors for disease. That means physical activity can play a role in preventing many diseases, including heart disease, stroke, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and depression.

Physical activity can also improve your ability to do the things you need to each day. It builds muscle strength and endurance, which may help prevent injuries and make it easier for you to climb stairs and get up from chairs. It can also help you think more clearly.

“It takes some effort to get physically active,” Galson says. But you

don’t have to get physical activity every day. The recently released recommendations say that exercise can be measured in weekly totals.

“The goal is to get at least 2½ hours of physical activity every single week,” Galson says. He notes this is different from previous guidelines that recommended getting a certain amount of physical activity every day. With the new guidelines, if you’ve missed a few days, you can still catch up on the weekends.

Galson also advises Americans to make a habit of fitting physical activity into their routines. “This has to be a permanent change for every American if we’re going to really keep up with the recommended levels of physical activity.”

So what exactly is physical activity? There are 2 types of activities included in the recommendations: aerobic and muscle-strengthening. Aerobic activities—also called endurance activities—are those in which you move your large muscles rhythmically for a long time.



There are different levels of aerobic activity. With moderate-intensity aerobic activities, you can talk while you do them, but not sing. Examples include walking briskly, water

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aerobics, ballroom or line dancing, general gardening or sports where you catch and throw. With vigorous-intensity activities, you can only say a few words before pausing to catch your breath. These include jogging, swimming laps, aerobic dancing, sports with a lot of running, and heavy gardening such as continuous digging or hoeing.

Muscle-strengthening happens when your muscles do more work than they are used to. Activities that strengthen muscle include heavy gardening, lifting weights, push-ups on

the floor or against the wall, sit-ups and working with resistance bands (long, wide rubber strips that stretch).

Try out a variety of different activities. "You can enjoy activities with friends, with family, with co-workers," says Dr. Ashley Wilder Smith at NIH's National Cancer Institute (NCI), who helped write the guidelines. "There are lots of ways to have physical activity enhance your life."

"We recognize that many people in the country are very inactive," says NCI's Dr. Richard Troiano, a captain in the Public Health Service who also helped create the guidelines. "Even moving from 30 minutes a week to 90 minutes a week, there's a reduction of 20% in death from all causes.... So a little bit of change results in a lot of benefit."

The experts agree that some physical activity, no matter how much, is better than none. You get substantial health benefits from at least 2½ hours a week of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity. For more extensive health benefits, increase your aerobic physical activity to 5 hours a week of moderate-intensity or 2½ hours of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity.

So how do you change? How can you start? Smith stresses the "Start Low and Go Slow" slogan in the consumer publication based on the new guidelines, *Be Active Your Way: A Guide for Adults*. "We have a number of scenarios for folks who are just starting," she says.

For example, walk a little more to



Web Links

For links to more information about the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, see this story online: <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2009/April/feature.htm>

the bus stop on your way to work, or park your car at the far end of the parking lot. Start with a 10-minute walk a couple of times a week. As you get used to it, increase the walk to 15, 20 and 30 minutes per day. When you reach 30 minutes per day, 5 days a week, you're meeting the minimum recommended activity level.

"There's a continuum of effort," Troiano says. "But because so much of our population is really at the very low end of activity, just getting people to move a little bit more will provide a tremendous benefit."

Many people who are just starting an exercise program or adding physical activity into their lives often wonder whether they need their doctor's permission. Smith says, "In the absence of a chronic condition or health-related symptoms, everyone should feel comfortable moving toward and working incrementally up to the guidelines. And you don't necessarily need your doctor's approval for that. We don't want people to feel like there's a gate in the way of them starting an exercise program."

"It's important for everyone, including people who have disabilities and kids," Acting Surgeon General Galson reminds us. "Everyone can get physical activity in their own way, and it will help their health."

So what are you waiting for? The *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* can help you get started now. In addition to guidelines for adults, there are guidelines for children and adolescents, older adults, and considerations for pregnant women and people with disabilities. For more information, visit www.health.gov/PAGuidelines.



Wise Choices Getting Active

- Team up with a friend. It will keep you motivated and be more fun.
- Pick activities that you like to do.
- Join a fitness group.
- Track your time and progress. It helps you stay on course.
- Talk to your health care provider about good activities to try.
- Ask the worksite wellness coordinator at your job for tips and advice.
- Don't forget muscle-strengthening activities for additional health benefits.

Answer the following questions in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What are 5 diseases or conditions that regular physical activity can help prevent?
2. How much physical activity is recommended every week? Do you think you get this amount of physical activity accomplished each week?
3. Describe the two types of recommended physical activity and provide an example of each.
4. Explain how you can change your daily routine so that you get a little more physical activity done each week.
5. What is the address of the website you can go to for more information about physical activity guidelines?