What is Physical Activity?

Physical activity simply means movement of the body that uses energy. Walking, gardening, briskly pushing a baby stroller, climbing the stairs, playing soccer, or dancing the night away are all good examples of being active. For health benefits, physical activity should be moderate or vigorous intensity.

Moderate physical activities include:

- Walking briskly (about 3 ½ miles per hour)
- Bicycling (less than 10 miles per hour)
- General gardening (raking, trimming shrubs)
- Dancing
- Golf (walking and carrying clubs)
- Water aerobics
- Canoeing
- Tennis (doubles)

Vigorous physical activities include:

- Running/jogging (5 miles per hour)
- Walking very fast (4 ½ miles per hour)
- Bicycling (more than 10 miles per hour)
- Heavy yard work, such as chopping wood
- Swimming (freestyle laps)
- Aerobics
- Basketball (competitive)
- Tennis (singles)

You can choose moderate or vigorous intensity activities, or a mix of both each week. Activities can be considered vigorous, moderate, or light in intensity. This depends on the extent to which they make you breathe harder and your heart beat faster.

Only moderate and vigorous intensity activities count toward meeting your physical activity needs. With vigorous activities, you get similar health benefits in half the time it takes you with moderate ones. You can replace some or all of your moderate activity with vigorous activity. Although you are moving, light intensity activities do not increase your heart rate, so you should not count these towards meeting the physical activity recommendations. These activities include walking at a casual pace, such as while grocery shopping, and doing light household chores.
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.

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**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.
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.

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**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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• 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.
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.

At play:

• Walk, jog, skate, or cycle.
• Swim or do water aerobics.
• Take a class in martial arts, dance, or yoga.
• Golf (pull cart or carry clubs).
• Canoe, row, or kayak.
• Play racquetball, tennis, or squash.
• Ski cross-country or downhill.
• Play basketball, softball, or soccer.
• Hand cycle or play wheelchair sports.
• Take a nature walk.
• Most important — have fun while being active!
be an active family

Physical activity is important for children and adults of all ages. Being active as a family can benefit everyone. Adults need 2½ hours a week of physical activity, and children need 60 minutes a day. Follow these tips to add more activity to your family’s busy schedule.

1. **set specific activity times**
   Determine time slots throughout the week when the whole family is available. Devote a few of these times to physical activity. Try doing something active after dinner or begin the weekend with a Saturday morning walk.

2. **plan ahead and track your progress**
   Write your activity plans on a family calendar. Let the kids help in planning the activities. Allow them to check it off after completing each activity.

3. **include work around the house**
   Involve the kids in yard work and other active chores around the house. Have them help you with raking, weeding, planting, or vacuuming.

4. **use what is available**
   Plan activities that require little or no equipment or facilities. Examples include walking, jogging, jumping rope, playing tag, and dancing. Find out what programs your community recreation center offers for free or minimal charge.

5. **build new skills**
   Enroll the kids in classes they might enjoy such as gymnastics, dance, or tennis. Help them practice. This will keep things fun and interesting, and introduce new skills!

6. **plan for all weather conditions**
   Choose some activities that do not depend on the weather conditions. Try mall walking, indoor swimming, or active video games. Enjoy outdoor activities as a bonus whenever the weather is nice.

7. **turn off the TV**
   Set a rule that no one can spend longer than 2 hours per day playing video games, watching TV, and using the computer (except for school work). Instead of a TV show, play an active family game, dance to favorite music, or go for a walk.

8. **start small**
   Begin by introducing one new family activity and add more when you feel everyone is ready. Take the dog for a longer walk, play another ball game, or go to an additional exercise class.

9. **include other families**
   Invite others to join your family activities. This is a great way for you and your kids to spend time with friends while being physically active. Plan parties with active games such as bowling or an obstacle course, sign up for family programs at the YMCA, or join a recreational club.

10. **treat the family with fun physical activity**
    When it is time to celebrate as a family, do something active as a reward. Plan a trip to the zoo, park, or lake to treat the family.
Hydration: Why It’s So Important

Why is it so important to stay hydrated?
Your body depends on water for survival. Did you know that water makes up more than half of your body weight? Every cell, tissue, and organ in your body needs water to function correctly. For example, your body uses water to maintain its temperature, remove waste, and lubricate joints. Water is essential for good health.

How does my body lose water?
You lose water each day when you go to the bathroom, sweat, and even when you breathe. You lose water even faster when the weather is really hot, when you exercise, or if you have a fever. Vomiting and diarrhea can also lead to rapid fluid loss. If you don’t replace the water you lose, you can become dehydrated.

How do I know if I’m dehydrated?
Symptoms of dehydration include:
- Little or no urine, or urine that is darker than usual
- Dry mouth
- Sleepiness or fatigue
- Extreme thirst
- Headache
- Confusion
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- No tears when crying

Don’t wait until you notice symptoms of dehydration to act. It can be hard to recognize when you’re dehydrated, especially as you age. Actively prevent dehydration by drinking plenty of water.

How much water should I drink each day?
There are different recommendations for water intake each day. Most people have been told they should be drinking 6 to 8 8-ounce glasses of water each day, which is a reasonable goal. However, different people need different amounts of water to stay hydrated. Most healthy people can stay well hydrated by drinking water and other fluids whenever they feel thirsty. For some people, fewer than 8 glasses may be enough. Other people may need more than 8 glasses each day.

Some people are at higher risk of dehydration, including those who get a lot of exercise, have certain medical conditions, are sick, or are not able to get enough fluids during the course of the
day. Older adults are also at higher risk. As you age, your brain may be unable to sense dehydration and send the signals for thirst.

If you are concerned that you may not be drinking enough water, check your urine. If your urine is consistently colorless or light yellow, you are most likely staying well hydrated.

You may need to increase the amount of water you are drinking if you:

- Have certain medical conditions, such as kidney stones or bladder infection
- Are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Are going to be outside during hot weather
- Are going to be exercising
- Have a fever, or have been vomiting or have diarrhea
- Are trying to lose weight

**Besides water, what else can I consume to stay well hydrated?**

Water is the best option for staying hydrated. There are other drinks and foods that can help provide the water you need, but some may add extra calories from sugar to your diet.

Drinks like fruit and vegetable juices, milk and herbal teas can contribute to the amount of water you should get each day. Even caffeinated drinks, such as coffee, tea and soda, count toward your daily water intake – up to a point. But it’s best to limit these since caffeine may cause some people to urinate more frequently, or feel anxious or jittery. A moderate amount of caffeine, 200 to 300 milligrams (about the amount in 2 to 4 8-ounce cups of coffee), is not harmful for most people.

Water can also be found in fruits and vegetables, such as watermelon, tomatoes and lettuce, and in soup broths.

**What about sports drinks?**

For most people, water is all that is needed to maintain good hydration. However, if you are planning on exercising at a high intensity for longer than an hour, a sports drink may be helpful because it contains carbohydrates that can prevent low blood sugar. A sports drink can also help replace electrolytes if you have a fever, have been vomiting or have had diarrhea.

Choose sports drinks wisely, as they are often high in calories from sugar and may contain high levels of sodium. Also check the serving size. One bottle may contain several servings. Some sports drinks contain caffeine. If you use a sports drink that contains caffeine, be careful not to get too much caffeine in your diet.

Sports drinks are **not** the same as energy drinks. Energy drinks usually contain large amounts of caffeine and other stimulants (for example, guarana or taurine) that your body doesn’t need. Most of these drinks are also high in sugar. Many experts recommend that kids and teens should not have energy drinks.

**Tips for staying hydrated**
• Keep a bottle of water with you during the day. Consider carrying a reusable water bottle and filling it from the tap rather than purchasing bottled water, which is expensive and creates plastic bottle waste.
• If plain water doesn’t interest you, try adding a slice of lemon or lime to your drink.
• If you’re going to be exercising, make sure you drink water before, during and after your workout.
  • Start and end your day with a glass of water.
• When you’re feeling hungry, drink water. The sensation of thirst is often confused with hunger. True hunger will not be satisfied by drinking water. Drinking water may also contribute to a healthy weight loss plan, as some research suggests drinking water will help you feel full.
• Drink on a schedule if you have trouble remembering to drink water. For example, drink water when you wake up; at breakfast, lunch and dinner; and when you go to bed. Or drink a small glass of water at the top of each hour.
• Drink water when you go to a restaurant. Not only does it keep you hydrated, but it’s free!

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Bibliography
See a list of resources used in the development of this information.

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