

Getting active

You do not have to be an athlete to benefit from regular physical activity. Even modest amounts of physical activity can improve your health. Start with small, specific goals such as walking 10 minutes a day, 3 days a week and slowly build up from there. Keep an activity log to track your progress.

Try these activities to add more movement to your daily life:

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Make sure the stairs are well lit.

- Get off the bus one stop early if you are in an area safe for walking.

- Park the car farther away from entrances to stores, movie theatres, or your home.

- Take a short walk around the block with family, friends, or coworkers.

- In bad weather, walk around a mall.

- Rake the leaves or wash the car.

- Visit museums, the zoo, or an aquarium. You and your family can walk for hours and not realize it.

- Take a walk after dinner instead of watching TV.

Are you ready to be even more active?

As you become more fit, slowly increase your pace, the length of time you are active, and how often you are active. Before starting a vigorous physical activity program, check with your health care provider if you are a man and over age 40 or a woman and over age 50, or have chronic health problems.

For a well-rounded workout plan, combine aerobic activity, muscle-strengthening exercises, and stretching. Do at least 30 minutes a day of moderate physical activity on most or all days of the week. Add muscle-strengthening activities to your aerobic workout two to three times a week.

To reduce the risk of injury, do a slow aerobic warm-up, then stretch before aerobic or strengthening activities. Follow your workout with a few more minutes of stretching. See WIN's brochure *Walking-A Step in the Right Direction* for stretching exercises.

Aerobic activity is any activity that speeds up your heart and breathing while moving your body at a regular pace. If you have been inactive for a while, you may want to start with easier activities such as walking at a gentle pace. This lets you build up to more intense activity without hurting your body.

Regular aerobic activity can help to:

- Control weight. Aerobic activity burns calories, which may help you manage your weight..

- Prevent heart disease and stroke. Regular aerobic activity can strengthen your heart muscle and lower your blood pressure. It may also help lower cholesterol, a type of fat in your blood.

- Maintain strong bones. Weight-bearing aerobic activities that involve lifting or pushing your own body weight, such as walking, jogging, or dancing, help to maintain strong bones.

Improve your outlook. Aerobic exercise relieves tension and decreases stress. As you get fit, it can help to build confidence and improve your self-image.

Choose aerobic activities that are fun. People are more likely to be active if they like what they are doing. It also helps to get support from a friend or a family member. Try one of these activities or others you enjoy:

- brisk walking or jogging
- bicycling
- swimming
- aerobic exercise classes
- dancing (square dancing, salsa, African dance, swing)
- playing basketball or soccer

Strengthening activities include lifting weights, using resistance bands, and doing push-ups or sit-ups. Besides building stronger muscles, strengthening activities may help you to:

Use more calories. Not only does the exercise burn calories, but having more muscle means you will burn more calories—even when you are sitting still.

Reduce injury. Stronger muscles improve balance and support your joints, lowering the risk of injury.

Maintain strong bones. Doing strengthening exercises regularly helps build bone and may prevent bone loss as you age.

Strengthening exercises should focus on working the major muscle groups of the body, such as the chest, back, and legs. Do exercises for each muscle group two or three times a week. Allow at least 1 day of rest for your muscles to recover and rebuild before another strengthening workout. (It is safe to do aerobic activity every day.)

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