

# Physical Activity

## Benefits of Physical Activity

The health benefits of physical activity are at the forefront of most discussions of health professionals these days regarding obesity, heart disease, Type II diabetes, and other chronic illnesses. Inactivity and poor nutrition cause at least 300,000 deaths each year in the United States, and obesity-related diseases cost the country more than \$100 billion each year. Regular physical activity is associated with immediate and long-term health benefits, such as weight control, cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, and lower blood pressure.

People once believed that only vigorous physical activity done for a designated time was the only physical activity with health benefits. Now, researchers have shown that 30 minutes of moderate physical activity daily will greatly reduce the risks of heart disease, as well as other chronic diseases such as diabetes, colon cancer, and osteoporosis. Physical activity should be enjoyable, and

## Physical activity guidelines

- Regular physical activity reduces the risk of many adverse health outcomes.
- Some physical activity is better than none.
- For most health outcomes, additional benefits occur as the amount of physical activity increases through higher intensity, greater frequency, and/or longer duration.
- Most health benefits occur with at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. Additional benefits occur with more physical activity.
- Both aerobic (endurance) and muscle-strengthening (resistance) physical activity are beneficial.
- Health benefits occur for children and adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, older adults, and those in every studied racial and ethnic group.
- The health benefits of physical activity occur for people with disabilities.
- The benefits of physical activity far outweigh the possibility of adverse outcomes.

## Guidelines for Children & Adolescents:

- **Aerobic:** Most of the 60 or more minutes a day should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, and should include vigorous-intensity physical activity at least 3 days a week.
- **Muscle-strengthening:** As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include muscle-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week.

- **Bone-strengthening:** As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include bone-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week.

Guidelines for adults:

- All adults should avoid inactivity. Some physical activity is better than none, and adults who participate in any amount of physical activity gain some health benefits.
- For substantial health benefits, adults should do at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous intensity aerobic activity. Aerobic activity should be performed in episodes of at least 10 minutes, and preferably, it should be spread throughout the week.
- For additional and more extensive health benefits, adults should increase their aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes (5 hours) a week of moderate intensity, or 150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity. Additional health benefits are gained by engaging in physical activity beyond this amount.
- Adults should also do muscle-strengthening activities that are moderate or high intensity and involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week, as these activities provide additional health benefits.

How is physical activity different from physical fitness?

You can probably remember physical fitness testing when you were in school – the mile run, as many sit ups as possible in one minute, and the impossible pull ups. For years, physical educators believed that students needed strenuous exercise and structured physical activity to push them to high levels of fitness (muscular strength and endurance, cardio respiratory endurance, flexibility) in order to be healthy.

In the 1990's, new research revealed that physical fitness testing often pushed students to failure and rather than encouraging physical activity, it was often times making students feel unsuccessful, unfit, and uninterested in pursuing physical activity in their leisure time. Now, things have changed. The emphasis on physical activity for all students regardless of ability level or limitations has demonstrated health benefits from moderate intensity levels of exercise. Healthy People 2010 helped turn the tide by encouraging daily physical activity, rather than focusing on fitness test scores – making physical activity choices that will carry on throughout a lifetime.

Physical Activity in Children

Children's participation in physical activity has declined over the years. Almost half of 12-21 year olds do not participate in physical activity on a regular basis (NASPE). A recent study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control showed 61.5% of children

ages 9-13 do not participate in an organized physical activity outside of school, and 22.6% do not participate in any free time physical activity.

Parents' perceived barriers to physical activity participation for these 9-13 year olds included transportation problems, lack of opportunities in their area, expense, parents' lack of time, and concerns about neighborhood safety.

### Ways to Increase Physical Activity

There are numerous ways to increase physical activity in your daily life. Of course, children can increase their physical activity levels by participating in sports or other physical activity as part of a team or group after school, unstructured play at home alone or with friends, physical education at school, family outings that involve physical activity, finding alternate activities to watching TV or playing computer games, as well as others. Opportunities are unique to each individual and family, according to environmental factors such as location, resources, etc. The best advice is for each family to decide what best fits their lifestyles, and plan physical activity opportunities as part of your every day schedules.

Some tips for increasing your daily physical activity and for making physical activity more enjoyable can be found at [20 ways to.....](#)

Also, find brochures for parents, teachers, and principals that suggest ways to increase physical activity among youth at the [Centers for Disease Control](#) website.

### Using Pedometers

One way to monitor the amount of physical activity you participate in each day is by wearing a pedometer, or step counter. Learn more about pedometers and how you can reach the 10,000 steps a day goal by clicking here! (link to the pedometer page)

### **Physical Activity Links:**

#### **The Importance of Physical Activity**

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/index.htm>

Source: CDC – National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

#### **US Health and Human Services Reports the Benefits of Physical Activity for Disease Prevention**

<http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2002pres/20020620.html>

Source: Press Release June 20, 2002 from US Dept of HHS (online)

#### **Benefits of Physical Activity**

<http://www.who.int/hpr/physactiv/health.benefits.shtml>

Source: World Health Organization online

**TV Turnoff Network**

A website dedicated to educating parents and teachers about helping children turn off the TV, including information about National TV-Turnoff Week.

<http://www.tvturnoff.org/>

Source: TV Turnoff Network

**Links to information about Youth Sports for Parents**

<http://pecentral.org/websites/youthsports.html>

Source: PE Central