Regular physical activity that is performed on most days of the week reduces the risk of developing or dying from some of the leading causes of illness and death in the United States. Regular physical activity improves health in the following ways:

- Reduces the risk of dying prematurely.
- Reduces the risk of dying prematurely from heart disease.
- Reduces the risk of developing diabetes.
- Reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure.
- Helps reduce blood pressure in people who already have high blood pressure.
- Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer.
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety.
- Helps control weight.
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps older adults become stronger and better able to move about without falling.
- Promotes psychological well-being.

Millions of Americans suffer from illnesses that can be prevented or improved through regular physical activity.

- 13.5 million people have coronary heart disease.
- 1.5 million people suffer from a heart attack in a given year.
- 8 million people have adult-onset (non-insulin-dependent) diabetes.
- 95,000 people are newly diagnosed with colon cancer each year.
- 250,000 people suffer from a hip fractures each year.
- 50 million people have high blood pressure.
- Over 60 million people (a third of the population) are overweight.
Physical Activity and Health

Adults

KEY MESSAGES

- Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits.
- Men and women of all ages benefit from a moderate amount of daily physical activity. The same moderate amount of activity can be obtained in longer sessions of moderately intense activities (such as 30 minutes of brisk walking) as in shorter sessions of more strenuous activities (such as 15–20 minutes of jogging).
- Additional health benefits can be gained through greater amounts of physical activity. Adults who maintain a regular routine of physical activity that is of longer duration or of greater intensity are likely to derive greater benefit. However, because risk of injury also increases with greater amounts of activity, care should be taken to avoid excessive amounts.
- Previously sedentary people who begin physical activity programs should start with short sessions (5–10 minutes) of physical activity and gradually build up to the desired level of activity.
- Adults with chronic health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, or obesity, or who are at high risk for these conditions should first consult a physician before beginning a new program of physical activity. Men over age 40 and women over age 50 who plan to begin a new program of vigorous activity should consult a physician to be sure they do not have heart disease or other health problems.

FACTS

- More than 60 percent of U.S. adults do not engage in the recommended amount of activity.
- Approximately 25 percent of U.S. adults are not active at all.
- Physical inactivity is more common among:
  - Women than men.
  - African American and Hispanic adults than whites.
  - Older than younger adults.
  - Less affluent than more affluent people.
- Social support from family and friends has been consistently and positively related to regular physical activity.
Physical Activity and Health
Adolescents and Young Adults

**Key Messages**

- Adolescents and young adults, both male and female, benefit from physical activity.
- Physical activity need not be strenuous to be beneficial.
- Moderate amounts of daily physical activity are recommended for people of all ages. This amount can be obtained in longer sessions of moderately intense activities, such as brisk walking for 30 minutes, or in shorter sessions of more intense activities, such as jogging or playing basketball for 15–20 minutes.
- Greater amounts of physical activity are even more beneficial, up to a point. Excessive amounts of physical activity can lead to injuries, menstrual abnormalities, and bone weakening.

**Facts**

- Nearly half of American youths aged 12–21 years are not vigorously active on a regular basis.
- About 14 percent of young people report no recent physical activity. Inactivity is more common among females (14%) than males (7%) and among black females (21%) than white females (12%).
- Participation in all types of physical activity declines strikingly as age or grade in school increases.
- Only 19 percent of all high school students are physically active for 20 minutes or more, five days a week, in physical education classes.
- Daily enrollment in physical education classes dropped from 42 percent to 25 percent among high school students between 1991 and 1995.
- Well designed school-based interventions directed at increasing physical activity in physical education classes have been shown to be effective.
- Social support from family and friends has been consistently and positively related to regular physical activity.
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps control weight, build lean muscle, and reduce fat.
- Prevents or delays the development of high blood pressure and helps reduce blood pressure in some adolescents with hypertension.

- Provide quality, preferably daily, K–12 physical education classes and hire physical education specialists to teach them.
- Create opportunities for physical activities that are enjoyable, that promote adolescents’ and young adults’ confidence in their ability to be physically active, and that involve friends, peers, and parents.
- Provide appropriate physically active role models for youths.
- Provide access to school buildings and community facilities that enable safe participation in physical activity.
- Provide a range of extracurricular programs in schools and community recreation centers to meet the needs and interests of specific adolescent and young adult populations, such as racial and ethnic minority groups, females, persons with disabilities, and low-income groups.
- Encourage health care providers to talk routinely to adolescents and young adults about the importance of incorporating physical activity into their lives.

For more information contact:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity, MS K-46
4770 Buford Highway, NE
Atlanta, GA 30341-3724
1-888-CDC-4NRG or 1-888-232-4674 (Toll Free)
http://www.cdc.gov

The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports
Box 5G
Suite 250
701 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
• Older adults, both male and female, can benefit from regular physical activity.

• Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits.

• Older adults can obtain significant health benefits with a moderate amount of physical activity, preferably daily. A moderate amount of activity can be obtained in longer sessions of moderately intense activities (such as walking) or in shorter sessions of more vigorous activities (such as fast walking or stairwalking).

• Additional health benefits can be gained through greater amounts of physical activity, either by increasing the duration, intensity, or frequency. Because risk of injury increases at high levels of physical activity, care should be taken not to engage in excessive amounts of activity.

• Previously sedentary older adults who begin physical activity programs should start with short intervals of moderate physical activity (5–10 minutes) and gradually build up to the desired amount.

• Older adults should consult with a physician before beginning a new physical activity program.

• In addition to cardiorespiratory endurance (aerobic) activity, older adults can benefit from muscle-strengthening activities. Stronger muscles help reduce the risk of falling and improve the ability to perform the routine tasks of daily life.

• The loss of strength and stamina attributed to aging is in part caused by reduced physical activity.

• Inactivity increases with age. By age 75, about one in three men and one in two women engage in no physical activity.

• Among adults aged 65 years and older, walking and gardening or yard work are, by far, the most popular physical activities.

• Social support from family and friends has been consistently and positively related to regular physical activity.
Benefits of Physical Activity

- Helps maintain the ability to live independently and reduces the risk of falling and fracturing bones.
- Reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease and of developing high blood pressure, colon cancer, and diabetes.
- Can help reduce blood pressure in some people with hypertension.
- Helps people with chronic, disabling conditions improve their stamina and muscle strength.
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression and fosters improvements in mood and feelings of well-being.
- Helps maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps control joint swelling and pain associated with arthritis.

What Communities Can Do

- Provide community-based physical activity programs that offer aerobic, strengthening, and flexibility components specifically designed for older adults.
- Encourage malls and other indoor or protected locations to provide safe places for walking in any weather.
- Ensure that facilities for physical activity accommodate and encourage participation by older adults.
- Provide transportation for older adults to parks or facilities that provide physical activity programs.
- Encourage health care providers to talk routinely to their older adult patients about incorporating physical activity into their lives.
- Plan community activities that include opportunities for older adults to be physically active.

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Physical Activity and Health

Persons with Disabilities

Key Messages

- Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits.
- Significant health benefits can be obtained with a moderate amount of physical activity, preferably daily. The same moderate amount of activity can be obtained in longer sessions of moderately intense activities (such as 30–40 minutes of wheeling oneself in a wheelchair) or in shorter sessions of more strenuous activities (such as 20 minutes of wheelchair basketball).
- Additional health benefits can be gained through greater amounts of physical activity. People who can maintain a regular routine of physical activity that is of longer duration or of greater intensity are likely to derive greater benefit.
- Previously sedentary people who begin physical activity programs should start with short intervals of physical activity (5–10 minutes) and gradually build up to the desired level of activity.
- People with disabilities should first consult a physician before beginning a program of physical activity to which they are unaccustomed.
- The emphasis on moderate amounts of physical activity makes it possible to vary activities to meet individual needs, preferences, and life circumstances.

Facts

- People with disabilities are less likely to engage in regular moderate physical activity than people without disabilities, yet they have similar needs to promote their health and prevent unnecessary disease.
- Social support from family and friends has been consistently and positively related to regular physical activity.

Benefits of Physical Activity

- Reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease and of developing high blood pressure, colon cancer, and diabetes.
- Can help people with chronic, disabling conditions improve their stamina and muscle strength.
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, improves mood, and promotes general feelings of well-being.
- Helps control joint swelling and pain associated with arthritis.
- Can help reduce blood pressure in some people with hypertension.
• Provide community-based programs to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.
• Ensure that environments and facilities conducive to being physically active are available and accessible to people with disabilities, such as offering safe, accessible, and attractive trails for bicycling, walking, and wheelchair activities.
• Ensure that people with disabilities are involved at all stages of planning and implementing community physical activity programs.
• Provide quality, preferably daily, K–12 accessible physical education classes for children and youths with disabilities.
• Encourage health care providers to talk routinely to their patients with disabilities about incorporating physical activity into their lives.

For more information contact:

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Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits.

Women of all ages benefit from a moderate amount of physical activity, preferably daily. The same moderate amount of activity can be obtained in longer sessions of moderately intense activities (such as 30 minutes of brisk walking) as in shorter sessions of more strenuous activities (such as 15–20 minutes of jogging).

Additional health benefits can be gained through greater amounts of physical activity. Women who can maintain a regular routine of physical activity that is of longer duration or of greater intensity are likely to derive greater benefit. However, excessive amounts of activity should be avoided, because risk of injury increases with greater amounts of activity, as does the risk of menstrual abnormalities and bone weakening.

Previously sedentary women who begin physical activity programs should start with short intervals (5–10 minutes) of physical activity and gradually build up to the desired level of activity.

Women with chronic health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, or obesity, or who are at high risk for these conditions should first consult a physician before beginning a new program of physical activity. Women over age 50 who plan to begin a new program of vigorous physical activity should first consult a physician to be sure they do not have heart disease or other health problems.

The emphasis on moderate amounts of physical activity makes it possible to vary activities to meet individual needs, preferences, and life circumstances.

More than 60 percent of U.S. women do not engage in the recommended amount of physical activity.

More than 25 percent of U.S. women are not active at all.

Physical inactivity is more common among women than men.

Social support from family and friends has been consistently and positively related to regular physical activity.
Benefits of Physical Activity

- Reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease and of developing high blood pressure, colon cancer, and diabetes.
- Helps maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps control weight, build lean muscle, and reduce body fat.
- Helps control joint swelling and pain associated with arthritis.
- May enhance the effect of estrogen replacement therapy in decreasing bone loss after menopause.
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression and fosters improvements in mood and feelings of well-being.
- Can help reduce blood pressure in some women with hypertension.

What Communities Can Do

- Provide environmental inducements to physical activity, such as safe, accessible, and attractive trails for walking and bicycling, and sidewalks with curb cuts.
- Open schools for community recreation, form neighborhood watch groups to increase safety, and encourage malls and other indoor or protected locations to provide safe places for walking in any weather.
- Encourage employers to provide supportive worksite environments and policies that offer opportunities for employees to incorporate moderate physical activity into their daily lives.
- Provide community-based programs to meet the needs of older women, women with disabilities, women of racial and ethnic minority groups, and women with low incomes. Include child care arrangements to encourage the participation of women with children.
- Encourage health care providers to talk routinely to female patients about incorporating physical activity into their lives.

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