

National Physical Activity Plan Frequently Asked Questions About Physical Activity

1. **QUESTION: What do we know about the health benefits of physical activity?**

RESPONSE: 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 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 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 of physical activity occur for children and adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, older adults, and those in every studied racial and ethnic group. Health benefits of physical activity are attainable for people with disabilities. The benefits of physical activity outweigh the risks of injury and heart attack.

SOURCE: [DHHS – National Physical Activity Guideline for Americans](#)

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2. **QUESTION: Do the benefits of physical activity apply to everyone?**

RESPONSE: Yes, the Physical Activity Guidelines are for Americans aged 6 years and older. The Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee did not review evidence for children younger than age 6, although physical activity for infants and young children is necessary for healthy growth and development. Children younger than age 6 should do physical activity appropriate for their age and stage of development.

SOURCE: [DHHS – National Physical Activity Guideline for Americans](#)

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3. **QUESTION: What are the current physical activity guidelines for adults?**

RESPONSE: Adults should do a minimum of 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week by doing activities like brisk walking, ballroom dancing, or general gardening.

Adults can choose 1 hour and 15 minutes (75 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity by doing exercise like jogging, aerobic dancing, and jumping rope.

Adults also may choose combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity.

Aerobic activity should be performed in episodes of at least 10 minutes, and preferably spread throughout the week. For additional and more extensive health benefits, adults should increase their aerobic physical activity to 5 hours (300 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity or 2 hours and 30 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 on 2 or more days a week to achieve the unique benefits of strengthening activities.

SOURCE: [DHHS – National Physical Activity Guideline for Americans](#)

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4. **QUESTION: What are the current physical activity guidelines for children and adolescents?**

RESPONSE: Children and adolescents aged 6–17 years should accumulate 1 hour or more of physical activity daily. The 1 hour of activity should be mostly aerobic but should also include muscle- strengthening and bone-strengthening activities. Youth should include vigorous-intensity activity in this 1 hour on at least 3 days a week. They should also do muscle-strengthening activities on at least 3 days and bone-strengthening activities on at least 3 days a week. It is important to encourage young people to participate in physical activities that are appropriate for their age, enjoyable, and offer variety. The Guidelines list a number of examples of each type of activity for children and adolescents.

SOURCE: DHHS – National Physical Activity Guideline for Americans

SOURCE: [DHHS – National Physical Activity Guideline for Americans](#)

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5. **QUESTION: Should everyone get the same amount of physical activity?**

RESPONSE: The amount of physical activity individuals should get each week differs based on a number of factors. The amount and types of activity needed varies based on age and special conditions. These conditions include pregnancy and the postpartum period for women, disabilities, and chronic medical or health conditions.

At a minimum, all adults and older adults should aim for 2 hours and 30 minutes each week. Youth should be active for 1 hour each day. Individuals have many choices about appropriate types and amounts of activity. To make these choices, American adults need to set personal goals for physical activity. People can meet the Guidelines and their own personal goals through different amounts and types of activity.

Inactive persons can begin to gain the health benefits as they increase their physical activity even before they reach 2 hours and 30 minutes each week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity.

SOURCE: [DHHS – National Physical Activity Guideline for Americans](#)

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6. **QUESTION: Is physical activity recommended for persons with disabilities?**

RESPONSE: Children, adolescents, adults, and older adults with disabilities should meet the Guidelines when possible and should avoid inactivity because physical activity offers many health benefits. When persons with disabilities are not able to meet the Guidelines, they should be as active as possible and avoid being inactive. Persons with disabilities should work with their health care provider to understand the types and amounts of physical activity appropriate for them.

SOURCE: [DHHS – National Physical Activity Guideline for Americans](#)

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7. **QUESTION: Are the physical activity guidelines different for older adults?**

RESPONSE: Many healthy and fit older adults can follow the guidelines for adults. Some adults who are unfit or who have activity-limiting chronic conditions may need to follow the guidelines for older adults.

Most of the guidelines are the same for adults and older adults, but some additional guidelines are just for older adults. These are:

When older adults cannot do 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week because of chronic conditions, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow.

Older adults should do exercises that maintain or improve balance if they are at risk for falling.

Older adults should use relative intensity to determine their level of effort for physical activity.

Older adults with chronic conditions should understand whether and how their conditions affect their ability to do regular physical activity safely.

SOURCE: [DHHS – National Physical Activity Guideline for Americans](#)

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8. **QUESTION: I'm not particularly active, and I haven't exercised in years. Is it safe for me to start now?**

RESPONSE: If you haven't been active for a long time, it's important to start out at a low level of effort and work your way up slowly. Beginning slowly will help you become more fit without straining your body. For example, you may want to start with walking, biking, or swimming at a comfortable pace and then gradually do more, or start strengthening exercises with 1- or 2-pound weights and gradually add heavier weights. You may want to talk with your doctor if you decide to start a vigorous exercise program or significantly increase your physical activity.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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9. **QUESTION: I have a medical condition (such as arthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease). Is it safe for me to exercise?**

RESPONSE: Exercise is safe for almost everyone. In fact, studies show that people with arthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart disease benefit from regular exercise and physical activity. In some cases, exercise actually can improve some of these conditions. You may want to talk with your doctor about how your health condition might affect your ability to be active.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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10. **QUESTION: Isn't it better for older adults to "take it easy" and save their strength?**

RESPONSE: Regular physical activity is very important to the health and abilities of older people. In fact, studies show that "taking it easy" is risky. For the most part, when older people lose their ability to do things on their own, it doesn't happen just because they've aged. It's usually because they're not active. According to the *U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health*, inactive people are nearly twice as likely to develop heart disease as those who are more active. Lack of physical activity also can lead to more visits to the doctor, more hospitalizations, and more use of medicines for a variety of illnesses.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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11. **QUESTION: How hard should I exercise?**

RESPONSE: No-one can tell you exactly how many pounds to lift or how steep a hill you should climb to reach a moderate or vigorous level of exercise because what's easy for one person might be difficult for another. You should match your activity to your own needs and abilities. Start from where you are and build up from there. Listen to your body. During moderate activity, for instance, you can sense that you are pushing yourself but that you aren't near your limit. As you become more fit, gradually make your activities more difficult. Generally, the more vigorous the activity and the more time you spend doing it, the more health benefits you will receive.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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12. **QUESTION: How long do I need to be active before I see results?**

RESPONSE: Once you start being physically active, you'll begin to see results in just a few weeks. You may feel stronger and more energetic than before. You may notice that you can do things more easily, faster, or for longer than before. As you become more fit, you may need to make your activities more challenging to see additional results.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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13. **QUESTION: I find it hard to make myself be active. What can I do?**

RESPONSE: You're more likely to keep going if you choose activities you enjoy, if you can fit them into your schedule, if you believe you'll benefit from them, and if you feel you can do them safely and correctly. Making a contract with a friend or family member also may help you keep your commitment. Setting small, realistic goals, checking your progress, and rewarding yourself when you reach your goal also can help. If you can stick with an exercise routine or physical activity for at least 6 months, it's a good sign that you're on your way to making physical activity a regular habit.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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14. **QUESTION: How do I find time to be active?**

RESPONSE: There are a number of ways to fit exercise and physical activity into your schedule. For example, exercise first thing in the morning before your day gets too busy, or combine physical activity with a task that's already part of your day, such as walking the dog or doing household chores. If you don't have 30 minutes in your daily routine to be active, look for three 10-minute periods.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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15. **QUESTION: What kind of equipment do I need?**

RESPONSE: For many activities, you don't need any equipment or special clothing. All you need for brisk walking, for example, is a pair of comfortable, non-skid shoes. For strength training, you can make your own weights from unbreakable household items. Many communities offer free or low-cost programs. Check with your local parks and recreation department or senior center about the facilities and programs in your area.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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16. **QUESTION: What if I have an injury or health problem that keeps me from exercising for a while? How do I know if it's safe for me to start again?**

RESPONSE: If you miss a few days or weeks of exercise because of an injury or illness, don't be discouraged. Once you recover, you can start again and be successful. Talk with your doctor about when you can resume your regular routine. When you start again, begin at about half the effort you were putting in when you stopped, then gradually build back up. With a little time, you'll be back at the same, or a better, fitness level.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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17. **QUESTION: Do I need to do other exercises in addition to my usual walking routine?**

RESPONSE: Most people tend to focus on one type of exercise or activity and think they're doing enough. Try to do all four types — endurance, strength, flexibility, and balance — because each one has different benefits. Doing one kind also can improve your ability to do the others. In addition, variety helps reduce boredom and risk of injury.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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18. **QUESTION: Is it better to join an exercise class or group, or exercise on my own?**

RESPONSE: There are many ways to be active. The key is to find activities you truly enjoy. If you prefer individual activities, try swimming, gardening, or walking. Dancing or playing tennis may be for you if you enjoy two-person activities. If group activities appeal to you, try a sport such as basketball or join an exercise class. Some people find that going to a gym regularly or working with a fitness trainer helps them stay motivated.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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19. **QUESTION: If I'm overweight or obese, what kinds of physical activity can I do?**

RESPONSE: You can do all kinds of physical activities, including the four types of exercise shown in this guide. Try walking, water exercises, dancing, or weight lifting. Anything that gets you moving — even for only a few minutes a day in the beginning — is a healthy start. Very large people may face special challenges. For example, you may not be able to bend or move easily, or you may feel self-conscious. Facing these challenges is hard — but it can be done. Feel good about what you can do, and pat yourself on the back for trying. It should get easier.

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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20. **QUESTION: I don't do any kind of physical activity, but I watch my diet and I'm not overweight. Isn't that enough?**

RESPONSE: Eating a nutritious diet and maintaining a healthy weight are only part of a healthy lifestyle. Regular physical activity is important to the physical and mental health of almost everyone, including older adults. Being physically active can help you stay strong and fit enough to keep doing the things you enjoy and to stay independent as you get older. Together, healthy habits such as physical activity, a balanced diet, and not smoking will help you achieve the best of health

SOURCE: [NIH – National Institute on Aging](#)

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21. **QUESTION: I'm on a diet to lose weight. Do I still need to exercise?**

RESPONSE: Physical activity is a key component of helping you move toward a healthier weight, as it can help you achieve the appropriate [calorie balance](#). People who exercise regularly may be more likely to keep the weight from coming back after losing weight

SOURCE: [Nutrition.gov](#)

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22. **QUESTION: What Can I Do as a Parent or Guardian to Help Prevent Childhood Overweight and Obesity?**

RESPONSE: To help your child maintain a healthy weight, balance the calories your child consumes from foods and beverages with the calories your child uses through physical activity and normal growth.

Remember that the goal for overweight and obese children and teens is to reduce the rate of weight gain while allowing normal growth and development. Children and teens should NOT be placed on a weight reduction diet without the consultation of a health care provider.

One part of balancing calories is to eat foods that provide adequate nutrition and an appropriate number of calories. You can help children learn to be aware of what they eat by developing healthy eating habits, looking for ways to make favorite dishes healthier, and reducing calorie-rich temptations.

Another part of balancing calories is to engage in an appropriate amount of physical activity and avoid too much sedentary time. Children and teens should participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily. Remember that children imitate adults. Start adding physical activity to your own daily routine and encourage your child to join you.

In addition to encouraging physical activity, help children avoid too much sedentary time. Although quiet time for reading and homework is fine, limit the time your children watch television, play video games, or surf the web to no more than 2 hours per day. Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) does not recommend television viewing for children age 2 or younger. Instead, encourage your children to find fun activities to do with family members or on their own that simply involve more activity

SOURCE: [CDC](#)

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