

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

THE MAGIC PILL

“There is no single drug that can give the same overall benefit to health that physical activity does. Everything that gets worse as we grow older gets better with exercise.”

I-Min Lee, MD, Harvard School of Medicine

HEALTH BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

May is Physical Fitness and Sports Month and the warmer spring weather provides plenty of opportunities to get outside and enjoy the sunshine. So buy a new pair of sneakers, dust off your bicycle and get out there.

Physical activity has been shown to:

- Reduce your risk of developing chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, colorectal cancer and diabetes
- Decrease and control your blood pressure, blood glucose (sugar) and weight
- Strengthen your bones, muscles and joints, which reduces arthritis pain and your risk of falling
- Raise your “healthy” (HDL) cholesterol
- Improve your sleep
- Help you manage stress better
- Help reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression
- Help you look and feel your best



The list goes on and on and it has virtually no harmful side effects. What medication can say that? Physical activity helps us to not only live longer, but to live a high quality and independent life.

Physical activity guidelines are different based on age, health status and goals. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend that adults get a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least 5 (preferably 7) days per week, or a minimum of 150 minutes of aerobic activity per week. This physical activity should include strength training twice a week and stretching on most days.

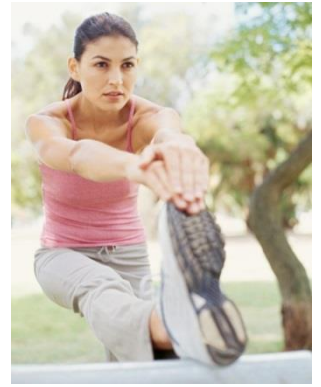
GETTING STARTED

Individuals who are over 45 or those with a serious health condition should check with their health care provider before beginning a physical activity program, especially if they have been inactive for a long time.

Always start slowly and progress gradually. Always begin your exercise routine with a warm-up. A warm-up is an activity, such as walking, done at a slow pace for about 5-10 minutes to get your blood circulating to the muscles to “warm them up.”

If you are new to exercise, start with as little as 10 minutes of moderate physical activity and add a minute or two each week until you are able to complete a minimum of 30 minutes a day, 5-7 days a week. Once you are able to complete 30 minutes comfortably, you can begin to increase the intensity to a moderate to vigorous level.

Always complete your activity with a cool-down, which is the same as a warm-up, but at the end of exercise. Remember to drink enough water, particularly if you are exercising vigorously for an extended period of time (45 minutes or longer), and especially if it is very warm outside.



BUILD ACTIVITY BACK INTO YOUR LIFE

Lack of time is the number one reason people give for not exercising. Lack of time, in addition to the many labor saving devices we enjoy, has caused us all to be very sedentary. Any increase in activity over what you are presently doing is beneficial.

Some easy ways to build physical activity back into your life are:

1. If you can, park a couple blocks from where you work. Walk to and from work. If you use mass transit, get off one stop early and walk the rest of the way.
2. Use the stairs instead of the elevator. If you work on the 10th floor, walk up one flight before taking the elevator. Periodically add another flight.
3. During commercial breaks, exercise or walk around. A 60-minute show averages 16 minutes of commercials.
4. Invest in a good pedometer. Track your usual steps for one day, then try to add more steps each day or week to get up to 10,000 steps (approximately five miles).
5. Don't take everything in from the car or upstairs (or downstairs) in one trip. Make multiple trips – add more steps.
6. Stretch at your desk a couple times each day. This is also a great stress reliever.

Additional guidelines to get started and tracking tools can be found at these websites.

1. Use WebMD's Eating & Diet tab at the top of the page. www.webmd.com
2. Use the government MyPlate website's Super Trackers to track your exercise. <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/SuperTracker/default.aspx>