Getting Started With Physical Activity

HEALTH ACTION GUIDE

Interested in becoming more active? Being physically active is one of the best things you can do for your overall health. The key is getting started on the right foot—find activities you enjoy and increase activity levels gradually and safely. Your body is built to move and an active lifestyle should feel good. Today you will learn how to create a personal, workable physical activity plan.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Some of the most common reasons people decide to become more active include:

- ☐ Losing weight or preventing weight gain
- ☐ Improving blood cholesterol levels
- ☐ Lowering blood pressure
- ☐ Lowering chance of heart attack and stroke
- ☐ Helping insulin work better in the body and preventing type 2 diabetes
- ☐ Having more energy
- ☐ Relieving stress
- ☐ Improving self-esteem
- ☐ Sleeping better
- ☐ Keeping bones strong
- ☐ Helping relieve depression and anxiety
- ☐ Feeling and looking healthy and fit

As you're thinking about starting an activity program, what would you like it to do for you? Take a minute now to think about some reasons you want to become more active and check any of the appropriate boxes from the list above.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

To promote and maintain health, the U.S. Department of Health and Human services encourages all healthy adults to accumulate at least:

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity cardio (aerobic) physical activity each week, or
- 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity cardio (aerobic) physical activity each week, or
- An equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity cardio (aerobic) physical activity.

There are many ways you can "mix and match" your activity to meet the guidelines. A typical option is to do 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity, such as brisk walking, five days a week. Another option is to go for a 50-minute brisk walk three days a week. With either option, at the end of the week you will have accumulated 150 minutes of moderate-intensity cardio activity. It's best to spread your activity throughout the week. In other words, don't plan to do all your minutes on one day and then be inactive the other six days of the week.

As long as you do activities for at least 10 minutes at a time, you can accumulate your time over multiple sessions in a day. For example, you can squeeze in a brisk 10-minute walk at lunchtime, in the late afternoon and then again in the evening.

© 2014 Health Fitness Corporation

AS YOU PROGRESS

As you make physical activity a habit and your body gets accustomed to exercise, you may eventually want to incorporate some vigorous-intensity cardio activities. When you combine moderate- and vigorous-intensity activities within a week, the general rule of thumb is that one vigorous-intensity minute equals two moderate-intensity minutes. For example, you can meet the recommendation by walking briskly for 35 minutes twice during the week and then jogging for 20 minutes on two other days (70 minutes moderate plus 40 minutes of vigorous x 2 = 150 total moderate minutes).

Moderate-intensity activities are generally equal to a brisk walk that noticeably increases the heart rate. It's easy to estimate your intensity using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is sitting and 10 is the highest level of effort possible. During an activity, simply ask yourself how much effort you are expending. Moderate-intensity physical activity will feel like a 5 or 6 on the scale of 0 to 10. You can also use the "talk test", which means that during moderate-intensity activity, you can talk, but not sing the words to your favorite song.

Vigorous-intensity activities are generally equal to running and cause rapid breathing and a substantial increase in heart rate. The effort level required to perform vigorous-intensity physical activity is usually a 7 or 8 on a scale of 0 to 10. During vigorous-intensity exercise, you won't be able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath.

A NOTE ABOUT STRENGTH AND FLEXIBILITY

As part of a balanced physical activity program, guidelines also encourage adults to perform muscle-strengthening and flexibility exercises two to three days a week. In addition, activities to support good motor skills, such as balance and coordination are advised. The primary purpose of this guide is to help you get started with aerobic physical activity.

ROADBLOCKS TO ACTIVITY

Although there are lots of good things about being active, many people experience roadblocks to actually doing it. Do any of these roadblocks get in your way?

- I don't have enough time.
- I'm too tired.
- I need to spend time with my family.
- I'd be embarrassed in exercise clothes.
- My family or friends are not active.
- I travel too much.
- It's too late to make a difference—I'm already too old (or too heavy).
- I get impatient and tend to jump into exercise too fast and hard. I get tired, sore and give up.

Do you have any other roadblocks? If so, note them here: _____

_____

_____

© 2014 Health Fitness Corporation

GETTING AROUND YOUR ROADBLOCKS

Roadblocks are very real, but there are often ways to get around them. The first step is to state exactly what the roadblock is. Next, note several possible strategies for getting around the roadblock. Then, choose one to try out and see how it works. If it doesn't work well, try another or adjust the first one.

Initial roadblock: *I'm too tired.*

More specific statement of roadblock: *When I first wake up, I'm too sleepy to be active. At night, I'm exhausted from the day.*

Possible strategies to get around roadblock:

- *I will go to bed earlier at night so I'll feel more energized in the morning.*
- *I will have a light breakfast and cup of coffee, then go for a walk.*
- *I will do my physical activity over the noon hour.*

Strategy I'll try first: *I'll try having a light breakfast and cup of coffee, then go for a walk.*

How did it work? *Good. I am awake enough to walk after breakfast. I do find I'm having a little trouble getting up earlier to leave time for my walk.*

Next step: *I will go to bed 30 minutes earlier so it's easier to get up on time in the morning.*

NOW FOR YOUR ROADBLOCK

Initial roadblock: _____

More specific statement of roadblock: _____

Possible strategies to get around roadblock:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Strategy I'll try first: _____

How did it work? _____

Next step: _____

© 2014 Health Fitness Corporation

YOUR PERSONAL ACTIVITY PLAN

Now that you know the benefits of physical activity, the exercise recommendations and how to overcome roadblocks, read on to complete your personal activity plan.

SAFETY FIRST

Physical activity is generally safe for everyone. However, if you haven't been physically active in a while, start slowly and gradually build up. Don't do vigorous exercise at first. If you have any of the following conditions, please talk with your physician before increasing physical activity:

- diabetes
- any disease of the heart or lungs
- high blood pressure
- any history of chest pain
- breathing problems or shortness of breath
- dizziness
- swelling in your ankles
- bone or joint problems
- unusual fatigue
- pregnancy

Stay in touch with your doctor about your exercise program and your health. Do not engage in exercise activities if you have a health condition that is unstable or serious, you have new symptoms or your doctor recommends against it.

CHOOSE AN ACTIVITY THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

Just about all activities can give you health benefits. What type of activity is best for you?

- Choose an activity you like to do. Enjoying what you do keeps it from becoming a chore. You might think back to activities you enjoyed as a child or maybe you've seen a class (such as ballroom dancing) that you'd like to try.
- Choose an activity you can easily fit into your routine. Remember, you don't have to do all of your activity at once to get the benefit.
- Choose an activity you have easy access to. If you enjoy tennis but do not have access to a tennis court, you probably won't play tennis on a regular basis. Find an activity that you can do regularly.
- Choose an activity you feel comfortable doing. For example, if you don't like swimming, choose something else.
- If you have physical limitations, consider meeting with a certified personal trainer or see if there are other types of activities (such as exercises classes in a pool) that may meet your needs.

Check off activities you think you would enjoy.

- ☐ Brisk walking
- ☐ Jogging
- ☐ Canoeing or kayaking
- ☐ Tennis
- ☐ Swimming or group water exercises classes
- ☐ Yard work/gardening
- ☐ Bicycling
- ☐ Dancing
- ☐ Other: _____

© 2014 Health Fitness Corporation

CHOOSING A TIME

One way to make regular physical activity a reality in your life is by choosing a time and sticking to it. Schedule your activity time by writing "exercise" or your planned "activity" on your calendar. Consider what times are possible for you and which time is likely to work best. The best time is one when you'll feel up to being active and have a low likelihood of something else coming up that gets in your way.

A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS

Most active people find it helpful to have the support of family or friends. Some people like to be active with another person. For others, the critical factor is having someone take care of another responsibility while they do their activity. Still others might find the daily question "Did you do your activity today?" to be most helpful.

Think about this: Who could support you in your activity program? In what way?

WARMING UP AND COOLING DOWN

Once you begin, don't forget to warm up and cool down your body before and after activity. The simplest way to warm up is to do your activity at a low intensity for at least the first five to 10 minutes of your session and gradually increase to your target intensity. Cooling down is just the opposite—you gradually reduce your intensity level during the last five to 10 minutes of your session.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Getting started with physical activity doesn't have to be strenuous to provide benefits. And it's never too late to start. Make copies of the My Personal Activity Plan and Activity Log on the following page and put it somewhere visible so you can track your progress and make adjustments along the way. If you are currently inactive, don't expect to reach the physical activity guidelines in the first week. Start gradually. Set realistic goals so you experience the sweet taste of success!

© 2014 Health Fitness Corporation

MY PERSONAL ACTIVITY PLAN AND ACTIVITY LOG

Week of: _____

My Goals: _____

If you plan to do more than one type of activity, write each activity goal below:

This week I will _____ for _____ minutes at a _____-intensity on _____ days.
(activity) *(moderate or vigorous)*

This week I will _____ for _____ minutes at a _____-intensity on _____ days.
(activity) *(moderate or vigorous)*

Example: This week I will **walk** for **15** minutes at a **moderate**-intensity on **3** days.

	Activity or activities	*# of minutes*	*Intensity (moderate or vigorous)*	*Notes (how did I feel, what worked or didn't, did I meet my goal, should I adjust my goal up or down?)*
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				
Total Minutes for the Week				

Sources: 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; American College of Sports Medicine.

This information is intended for educational purposes only and should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please consult your doctor for advice about changes that may affect your health.

HealthFitness.

© 2014 Health Fitness Corporation