

Getting started with physical activity

Benefits of physical activity

There are many benefits of physical activity. Here are just a few:

- Makes your heart, muscles and bones stronger
- Improves mood, lowers anxiety and helps relieve stress
- Gives you more energy
- Improves blood circulation
- Increases your good cholesterol (HDL)
- Improves your sleep
- Keeps your body and joints flexible
- Helps you lose weight, stay at a healthy weight, and prevent extra weight gain
- It can be fun!

Getting started

1. Get a checkup from your health care provider. Ask your provider which physical activities would be best for you.
2. Using suggestions from your health care provider, choose activities you like to do and will have fun with.
3. Make a plan and set goals. Write down what you will do, when you will do it, and how long you will do it. Make your plans realistic.
4. Ask a friend to join you for support and motivation.
5. Start slowly. You may need to start with 5-10 minutes of physical activity a few times a week and slowly increase time and intensity.

Types of physical activity

The key to living healthier is staying active. Try a variety of activities within your routine.

Aerobic – activities that raise your heart rate and breathing for an extended period of time. Examples include fast walking, jogging, dancing, and swimming. Try to work up to 30 minutes of aerobic activity at least five days a week.

Strength training – activities meant to increase strength in specific muscles. Examples include push-ups, sit-ups, lifting weights, and using resistance bands. Try to work up to 30 minutes of strength training at least twice a week.

Flexibility – activities that gently stretch your muscles and increase your range of motion. Examples include gentle yoga and tai chi. Try to do gentle stretching with any activity you do.

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Add physical activity into your day

Even small amounts of physical activity can improve your health.

You can get more physical activity throughout your day by trying the following:

- Walk whenever you can; for example, while talking on the phone
- Park at the end of the parking lot and walk to the store
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator
- Get up and move around during TV commercial breaks
- Do 5-10 minutes of house chores, yard work, or gardening
- Do leg lifts from your chair while waiting for appointments or while watching TV

Safety tips

- Talk with your health care provider if you have any questions about any activities you should or should not do. For example, if you have had hip or knee surgery, ask before doing lower body exercises.
- Warm up before starting your physical activity and cool down and stretch afterwards.
- Remember to breathe deeply and not hold your breath.
- Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water before, during, and after physical activity. Check with your health care provider if you have been told to limit your fluid intake.
- Use safety equipment. For example, wear a helmet when riding a bike.
- Never “bounce” when stretching. Instead make slow, steady movements.
- Listen to your body. Extreme tiredness, sore joints, and painful muscles mean you are doing too much. Slow down and reduce the intensity of your activity.

Make your own equipment

Being physically active does not require gym equipment. Like the best things in life, staying fit can be free. Here are some unbreakable household items that can be used as weights:

- Soup or vegetable cans
- Bottled water
- A sock filled with dried beans and tied closed
- A plastic milk jug filled with water or sand with the opening securely closed

Every little bit of physical activity adds up and helps improve your health. Work together with your health care provider to come up with a plan that is best for you.