

2.5: Developing a Personal Exercise Program

Make Physical Activity a Regular Part of the Day



Choose activities that you enjoy and can do regularly. Fitting activity into a daily routine can be easy — such as taking a brisk 10 minute walk to and from the parking lot, bus stop, or subway station. Or, join an exercise class. Keep it interesting by trying something different on alternate days. Every little bit adds up and doing something is better than doing nothing.

Be physically active at least 10 minutes at a time, because shorter bursts of activity will not have the same health benefits. For example, walk your dog for 10 minutes before and after work, and go for a 10-minute walk at lunchtime. That adds up to 30 minutes of moderate exercise for the day. If you don't have a dog to walk, then you could take a brisk 10-minute walk to and from the parking lot or bus stop before and after work or class.

Gradually Increase Your Level of Physical Activity

Inactive adults or those who don't yet do 150 minutes of physical activity a week should work gradually toward this goal. The initial amount of activity should be at a light or moderate intensity, for short periods of time, with the sessions spread throughout the week. The good news is that “some is better than none.”

To reduce risk of injury, it is important to increase the amount of physical activity gradually over a period of weeks to months. For example, an inactive person could start with a walking program consisting of 5 minutes of walking several times each day, 5 to 6 days a week. The length of time could then gradually be increased to 10 minutes per session, 3 times a day, and the walking speed could be increased (to ultimately meet the time and intensity guidelines).

Muscle-strengthening activities should also be gradually increased over time. Initially, these activities can be done just 1 day a week starting at a light or moderate level of effort. Over time, the number of days a week can be increased to 2, and then possibly to more than 2. Each week, the level of effort (intensity) can be increased slightly until it becomes moderate to high.

Warm-up and Cool-down

Commonly, the warm-up and cool-down involve doing an activity at a slower speed or lower intensity. A warm-up before moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic activity allows a gradual increase in heart rate and breathing at the start of the episode of activity. A cool-down after activity allows a gradual decrease at the end of the episode. Time spent doing warm-up and cool-down may count toward meeting the aerobic activity guidelines if the activity is at least moderate intensity (for example, walking briskly as a warm-up before jogging). A warm-up for muscle-strengthening activity commonly involves doing exercises with lighter weight. Stretching is often incorporated during the warm-up and cool-down, and is helpful for reducing the risk of injury, as well as improving flexibility.

Ways to Get Moving

- Many activities can be worked into your daily routine so that you don't have to go to the gym or an exercise class.
- Always be prepared. Keep a pair of walking or running shoes and some comfortable clothes readily available.
- Walk (briskly)! Do it in your neighborhood, find a local trail, or go to the mall and walk around before you shop. Walk during your lunch break, in between classes, or to do your errands. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Park in the farthest parking spot and take an extended route to your classroom, office, or store.
- Make exercise a social event. Walk with friends, a family member, or even join a walking group to make it more fun. Take dancing lessons, or a Zumba class.
- Get a jump rope! Jumping rope is an inexpensive exercise that can be done anywhere.
- Add calisthenics (jumping jacks, push-ups, squats, crunches, etc.) to the mix for muscle strengthening.
- Participate in a sport such as tennis, softball, basketball or touch football. Play golf, but push or carry your golf bag rather than ride in a golf cart. Keep your activities interesting by trying something different on alternate days.

- Do household chores that increase your heart rate. Vacuuming, mopping, and sweeping can get your heart pumping. Mow the lawn with a push mower, garden/shovel, rake leaves, or wash and wax your car.
- Make exercise a family activity. Get outdoors and hike, ride bikes, skate, swim, go canoeing, kayaking, or just take a brisk walk together.

Achieving Target Levels of Physical Activity

Key Points:

- Going to the gym is NOT required for achieving the recommended guidelines
- Incorporating more brisk walking throughout the day can add up to reaching your goals – just be sure it occurs for at least **10 minutes** at a time
- Getting started is the first important step – gradually work your way to the recommended levels

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