



Enjoy the Health Benefits of an Active Life

Join with thousands of other Adventist Christians all over North America who are interested in improving their fitness and health—and experience the "abundant life" God intended for us to enjoy.

Did you know?

- People who walk half an hour daily cut their risk of a heart attack in half compared to those who seldom exercise?
- People who are physically active are happier, cope better with stress, have less depression, and sleep better?
- That the best predictor of a long, healthy life is your level of physical activity?
- If you walk half an hour daily, you will burn the equivalent of 15 pounds of fat in a year?

God is Interested in Your Health

God wants all of us to be in step with Him spiritually and physically. *"I've come that you might have life and have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). As you study the body and how it is made, it becomes abundantly clear that it was designed to be physically active. The old adage, "Use it or lose it" certainly applies here. If you want good health, you need to be physically active. Let's take a quick look at both inspiration and scientific research on how physical activity can enrich your life.

Ellen White in the book *Counsels on Health*, page 52 makes this fascinating statement about exercise, and in particular about walking: *"All who can possibly do so ought to walk in the open air every day, summer and winter. A walk, even in winter, would be more beneficial to the health than all the medicine the doctors may prescribe."*¹ Let's take a look at what researchers are finding out about the benefits of physical activity and I think you'll agree that exercise is powerful preventive medicine.

Benefits of Exercise

Regular physical activity is strong medicine. Research shows that exercise is one of the best ways to prevent serious disease and improve the quality of health and life. Here are a few of the ways research has shown that regular physical activity can benefit your health:

- **Reduce your risk of a heart attack.** In Harvard's study of over 80,000 nurses, persons who walked briskly for 30 minutes a day, five or more days per week, cut their risk of a heart attack in half compared to persons who got no regular exercise.²
- **Cut your risk of diabetes.** Type 2 diabetes is one of the fastest growing and most serious diseases today. Doctors estimate that persons born today have one chance in three of developing diabetes in their lifetime. In a study of 2,478 young adults, those who took up exercise and remained active during the 15-year study, cut their risk of developing diabetes by 60% compared to those who remained sedentary.³ Imagine the impact on the health of our nation and healthcare costs if every sedentary person became physically active! The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that about 27% of all healthcare costs are linked to a sedentary lifestyle and excess body weight.⁴
- **Protect yourself from cancer.** The American Cancer Society⁵ states that regular exercise may be helpful in preventing some of our most common cancers, including breast, colon, prostate, and endometrial cancer. In a recent study including over a quarter million men and women, those who were most active had a 45% decreased risk of dying from any cancer over the five year study compared to inactive individuals.⁶
- **Hip fractures.** In a large study of older persons, brisk walking cut the risk of hip fractures by 65% in women⁷ and vigorous activity cut the risk of hip fractures in men⁸ by 62%.
- **Strokes.** In a large study of men, those who were most active and fit cut their risk of stroke by two-thirds (68%) compared to inactive men.⁹
- **Blood pressure.** In a large study of men, regular physical activity reduced the risk of developing high blood pressure by 57%.¹⁰
- **Mood.** Several large studies have shown that people who are physically active are happier and have less depression.¹¹
- **Colds and Flu.** Researchers found that fit men are 34% less likely to catch a cold or the flu bug.¹²
- **Weight.** Regular exercise is also one of the best ways to help you keep your weight in control over a lifetime.

Enjoy Years of Added Life

All Adventists look forward to spending an eternity with God. However, God also wants us to enjoy good health and a long life here and now as well. The apostle John reminds us of this fact in his Epistle (3 John 2), "Beloved, I wish above all things that you prosper and be in good health, even as your soul prospers." Adventists were featured in the *National Geographic* magazine in an article on long-lived people. We don't smoke; we eat better than the average person, but are we more fit than the average citizen? What would our experience and example be if we were all active? The best way to answer that question is to review what health research is finding. Here are several enlightening studies:

With fewer health problems due to your active life, you can expect to live longer and enjoy a higher quality of life all your years. Here are some of the studies related to an active lifestyle and improved longevity.

The Alameda County Study was one of the earliest studies linking activity level to longevity. During the 9 years of follow-up of nearly 7,000 men and women, active men (less than 50 at the start of the study) had only one-third as many deaths as inactive men, and active women had only one-fourth as many deaths. This resulted in several years of added life for both men and women.¹³

The Adventist Health Study also found physical activity to be a strong predictor of longevity. Active women lived over two years longer, and active men over 3 years longer than inactive Adventists.¹⁴

A study of 16,000 Harvard Alumni found that over a 15 year follow-up period, those who walked 6-9 miles weekly had a significantly lower risk of death, and those who walked 10+ miles weekly lived even longer.¹⁵ The researchers estimated that for every hour the alumni exercised, they lived an extra two hours longer. Not a bad investment! You don't lose time from exercise, you gain it! Another finding was that persons who were overweight but exercised, lived longer than those with a healthy weight but were not active.¹⁶

The Framingham Heart Study, one of the earliest and longest health studies ever conducted found that men who got regular moderate exercise lived 1.3 years longer, but if they exercised longer and/or more vigorously, they added 3.7 years to their life. Women added 1.5 years from moderate activity and 3.3 years when they exercised longer and more vigorously. This study also found that active people enjoyed lives free of cardiovascular disease much longer than inactive persons. The researchers concluded with this statement, "Our study suggests that following an active lifestyle is an effective way to achieve healthy aging."¹⁷

NIH-AARP Diet and Health Study.¹⁸ One of the most fascinating studies showing the benefits of both moderate and vigorous activity on health outcomes is a study sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and the American Association of Retired Persons. The study includes over 1.2 million person-years of follow-up. The researchers found that persons getting regular moderate activity had a 27% decrease in mortality from any cause over the course of the study (about 5 years). Those people who got vigorous activity experienced a 32% decreased risk of death from any cause, and if they met both criteria, they had a 50% decreased risk of dying from any cause. Next, they looked at specific groups of people at increased risk due to other risk factors, specifically excess weight or smoking. Both smokers and overweight or obese individuals who were active cut their risk of death by over 50% compared to inactive smokers or obese individuals. This is great news. Smokers who can't stop smoking can still cut their risk of dying early in half by becoming physically active. In fact, several studies have shown that smokers who exercise regularly have a lower risk of dying overall than non-smokers who don't exercise regularly.¹⁹ Likewise, overweight or obese

persons who can't seem to lose weight can also cut their risk of dying early by half (52%) by getting regular physical activity. The two primary diseases that physical activity showed a decrease in mortality were a 68% decreased risk of heart attacks and strokes, and a 45% decrease in risk of death from cancer. This is good news to most people! No matter what your problem, it seems that physical activity cuts your risk and protects you against serious illness and early death. Physical activity is almost like an antidote that helps overcome many health problems. In fact, this large study showed that any increase in activity (even levels less than recommended) showed a decrease in mortality. God designed the body to be active and by keeping active throughout your lifetime you reap great health advantages.

Seniors

Even if you are getting older, physical activity is still an important protector against early death from any cause. A recent study of older adults (aged 60 and older) looked at physical activity levels in 2,603 people. Researchers tested their fitness levels by having them do a maximal walk test on a treadmill. This is more accurate and reliable than asking people to report how active they are. After 12 years, researchers looked to see who was still alive and who had died (researchers like this outcome because it's easy to tell which category they are in). Persons who were the most active or fit (top 20%) had a mortality rate less than one-third (30%) that of those who were inactive.²⁰ This is a remarkable difference. If you want to enjoy your retirement years and play with your grandkids, your chances of survival are more than three times as good if you stay physically active during your older years.

The benefits of an active lifestyle are clearly impressive. Just knowing these facts, however, will have little effect on our health unless we all put them into practice. If you are active now, great! Keep it up and encourage family and friends to join you in an active lifestyle. If you are not active now, consider the benefits and more abundant life God wants you to enjoy. Start where you are. If you haven't exercised for years, don't try to get back into shape overnight. Start at an easy level. Follow the Physical Activity Guidelines and gradually increase your time and intensity until you meet your goal. Let's get in step for life!

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⁴ Anderson, L. H., Martinson, B. C., Crain, A. L., Pronk, N. P., Whitebird, R. R., Fine, L. J., & O'Connor, P. J. (2005). Health care charges associated with physical inactivity, overweight, and obesity. *Preventing Chronic Disease Vol 2, No. 4*.

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- ¹⁴ Fraser, G. E. & Shavlik, D. J. (2001). Ten years of life: Is it a matter of choice? *Archives of Internal Medicine* 161, 1645-1652.
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