



Physical Activity Guidelines

The American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine have issued specific guidelines for physical activity for all Americans. Here is a summary of their recommendations:

- All healthy adults need moderate-intensity aerobic (endurance) physical activity for a minimum of 30 minutes on five days each week or vigorous activity for a minimum of 20 minutes on three days each week.
- Combinations of moderate and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet these recommendations. For example, you can walk briskly for 30 minutes twice a week and then jog for 20 minutes on two other days. If you meet both criteria, you will experience greater benefits. Other research indicates that people who set an activity goal of getting 10,000 steps daily¹ also show significant health and fitness improvements.
- Moderate-intensity activity is generally equivalent to a brisk walk and noticeably increases the heart rate. You can accumulate your 30 minutes with 10- or 15-minute bouts of exercise if desired rather than doing it all at once.
- Vigorous-intensity activity is exemplified by jogging and causes rapid breathing and a substantial increase in heart rate.
- Because of the dose-response relationship between physical activity and health, persons who wish to further improve their health, prevent disease, or prevent unhealthy weight gain, may benefit by getting additional exercise above these minimum recommended levels. In fact, the American Cancer Society² recommends 45-60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most days of the week for best results in preventing cancer. The Institute of Medicine³ recommends at least 60 minutes of moderate activity daily to prevent weight gain, or more if needed. They also recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity for all children daily.
- In addition, every adult should perform activities that maintain or increase muscular strength a minimum of two days each week. Maintaining muscle mass and strength is essential for maintaining function and good health as we get older, and for maintaining healthy bones. It's recommended that eight to ten strength-building exercises be performed on two nonconsecutive days each

week using the major muscle groups. For best results, choose a resistance exercise (or weight) that allows eight to twelve repetitions of each exercise that result in substantial fatigue (meaning you don't want to do any more). Examples of muscle-strengthening exercises include weight-training programs, barbell lifting, weight-bearing calisthenics (e.g., pushups and curl-ups), and stair climbing. If you are not familiar with weight training, get a fitness trainer to show you examples.

- The guidelines state that it is not necessary for all people beginning a moderate intensity physical activity program to get medical clearance before beginning. However, persons with symptoms or cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, or other active chronic disease should consult a physician or healthcare provider prior to any substantial increase in physical activity, especially vigorous intensity activities. Complete the [Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire](#). It will help you decide whether you can start safely now or if you need to see your doctor before beginning a walking program. Follow the directions on your form for medical clearance if recommended.
- Older adults or persons with functional limitations are also recommended to do stretching exercises at least twice a week for a minimum of 10 minutes, to help maintain good function, range of motion, and health of all the joints.

Resources

- [Fitness Guidelines for Americans](#) - Children, Adults, and Older Adults. The latest information on how to start your exercise program safely and correctly for best results.
- [Videos online](#) to help you get started on an exercise program including muscle strengthening exercises. Prepared by CDC.
- [5K Training Program](#) that utilizes a method alternating running with walking to prevent injury.

¹ Bravata, D. M., Smith-Spangler, C., Sundaram, V., Gienger, A. L., Lin, N., Lewis, R., . . . Sirard, J. R. (2007). Using pedometers to increase physical activity and improve health. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 298, 2296-2304.

² Kushi, L. H., Byers, T., Doyle, C., Bandera, E. V., McCullough, M., Gansler, T., . . . & The American Cancer Society 2006 Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee. (2006). American Cancer Society guidelines on nutrition and physical activity for cancer prevention. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians* 56, 254-281.

³ Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences. (2002). Dietary reference intakes. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.