



EXTENSION

Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

Living Actively for Good Health¹

Jennifer Hillan and Anne Kendall²

If you think physical activity is limited to exercise classes and sports, think again! Read on to learn why people of all ages need physical activity for good health and how to get started.

What is Physical Activity and Why is it Important?



Physical activity is any body movement that uses energy. It includes not only sports, but also daily activities such as house or yard work and walking. Regular physical activity helps keep the heart, lungs, bones, muscles, and joints healthy. It also helps:

- ✓ improve energy level, self-esteem, and sense of well-being
- ✓ decrease stress and depression
- ✓ manage weight
- ✓ increase strength and flexibility
- ✓ decrease the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, some types of cancer, and osteoporosis (weak, brittle bones)
- ✓ improve balance and coordination

How Much and What Types of Activity do I Need?

Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity most days of the week. Kids need at least 60 minutes each day. Moderate-intensity activity should slightly increase your breathing and heart rate. Try walking briskly or climbing stairs. At least twice a week, do some stretching exercises. Stretch after your moderate-intensity activity, when your muscles are warm.



Do some strength exercises 2 or 3 days a week. Try push-ups, pull-ups, and sit-ups. You can also lift weights or canned soup. Start slowly and work up to one or two sets of 8-12 repetitions of each exercise.

Look for any chance to be active during the day. Play tag with your kids, take the stairs instead of the elevator, or park a few blocks from the store and walk. It all adds up!

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2. Jennifer Hillan, MSH, RD, LD/N, coordinator, Educational/Training Programs, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences; Anne Kendall, PhD, RD, LD/N, lecturer, Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

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If physical activity sounds overwhelming, don't despair! If you haven't been active, start slowly and increase your activity gradually. Remember, doing something is better than doing nothing!

Beating the Barriers

Not enough time. The goal is at least 30 minutes of activity during day. It doesn't have to be all at once!



- ✓ Get up early for a short walk.
- ✓ Climb the stairs during your lunch break.
- ✓ Ride a stationary bike or do a dance while watching TV.

If you have time to watch TV, you have time to be physically active!

Too boring. Choose activities that you enjoy and invite a friend along. Vary your activities and routines—try a different walking path.

Not motivated. Set realistic short and long-term goals. Reward yourself when you reach them! Keep an activity log so you can look back and see how far you've come. Find an exercise partner!



Not enough energy. Physical activity actually increases your energy level. Be active for 5 minutes and if you're tired after that time, stop. But chances are you'll feel like continuing!

Tips for Keeping it Safe

Get a check-up. Talk with your health care provider before increasing your physical activity if:

- you are an inactive man over age 40 or inactive woman over 50 planning to start **vigorous** activity
- you have diabetes, heart disease, or another chronic health condition
- you are at high risk for heart disease

Keep hydrated. Drink water before, during, and after your activity.



Warm up and cool down. Light activity and stretching before and after your moderate-intensity activity reduces your risk of injury.

Be cautious. Tell someone where you are going, and wear reflective clothing or shoes if you are outside at night.

How Much is Too Much?

Your body will tell you if you're doing too much. Pay attention to early warning pains and don't push yourself so much that your activity is no longer enjoyable. Seek medical advice if you become dizzy or have an injury, severe muscle soreness, or chest pain.

It's easy to get started and make regular physical activity a lifelong habit!

- ✓ Talk to your health care provider if needed.
- ✓ Choose an activity you enjoy.
- ✓ Start slowly and increase your activity gradually.