

Health benefits of exercise

We all know that regular exercise is good for health. But sometimes we feel it is too hard to get started. Here are answers to common questions and some tips to help.

Why should I exercise?

An active lifestyle improves your health in many ways. Regular exercise can

- Reduce your risk of dying from heart disease
- Treat or prevent high blood pressure
- Lower your LDL (bad) cholesterol and increase your HDL (good) cholesterol
- Reduce your risk of colon cancer and breast cancer
- Help treat or lower the risk of diabetes
- Help you lose excess fat and help keep your bones and joints healthy
- Help you combat feelings of depression and anxiety
- Help you decrease stress and anxiety
- Help you improve the quality of your life!

How much should I exercise?

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests that adults engage in moderate-intensity physical activities for at least 30 minutes on 5 or more days of the week. If your schedule doesn't allow this, you can also try exercising three times a day for 10 minutes at a time.

Some examples of moderate-intensity physical activities are

- Gardening for 30 to 45 minutes
- Washing and waxing a car for 45 to 60 minutes
- Walking 1.75 miles in 35 minutes (20 minutes/mile)
- Bicycling 5 miles in 30 minutes
- Pushing a stroller 1.5 miles in 30 minutes
- Raking leaves for 30 minutes
- Shoveling snow for 15 minutes
- Stair walking for 15 minutes.

For more ideas about how to add moderate-intensity physical activity to your life, go to www.cdc.org.

How do I get started exercising?

Even if you have not been active for a long time, it is never too late to start exercising. Use the FIT principles:

- **Frequency:** Begin with two to three exercise sessions per week and gradually increase the number of sessions until you are exercising 5 or more days each week.

- **Intensity:** Moderately intense activity can include traditional exercise such as walking, swimming, and cycling, or active lifestyle activities such as manual housework or yard work.

- **Time:** Start with 5 to 10 minutes of activity during an exercise session, and gradually work up to at least 30 minutes per day. Even on days you are too busy for a formal exercise session, remember that any activity is better than no activity. Take the stairs. Park your car at the far end of the lot. Bag and carry your own groceries. Mow the lawn.

When will I see changes?

Remember that regular exercise over a long period of time is what counts toward good health. It may take 4 to 6 weeks until you see changes in your body shape or weight. You will probably increase your energy, sleep better, and decrease stress right away.

How do I stay motivated?

- **Make the commitment:** Think of exercise as part of your everyday activities, and plan accordingly. Plan exercise sessions into your day, just like any other commitment.

- **Find a partner:** People who exercise with a partner or group are more likely to stay on track. Involve family members and friends. You will be less likely to skip your workout if you know somebody else is counting on you. Don't forget your four-legged friends—dogs need exercise too!

- **Write it down:** An exercise log or journal can help you chart your progress and provide motivation on those days that you just don't feel like getting off the couch. Log what you did, how long you did it, and how you felt afterwards.

- **Motivate yourself with music:** People who exercise to music report exercising longer and more vigorously than those who don't. Exercise to your favorite songs and see if this approach helps to motivate you.

- **Have fun:** Even though you might not believe it until you try it, exercise is fun and enjoyable. You will be more apt to stay with your program if you branch out and try different activities. □