



Exercise Guide



Exercising is a vital part of a healthy lifestyle. Besides helping you manage your weight, regular physical activity can help you boost your energy level and reduce stress. It strengthens bones and builds muscle, helping protect you against osteoporosis. It reduces stress and anxiety, enhances your immune system, and allows your heart to pump blood through your body more efficiently.

If you already have a medical condition, physical activity might help you manage your symptoms better. For example, regular physical activity can reduce joint swelling in people with arthritis, according to the Surgeon General's report. Exercise can also help people with diabetes lower and control their blood glucose levels. It also protects them against heart disease, the leading killer of people with diabetes, according to the American Diabetes Association. Research has shown that exercising during a cardiac rehabilitation program can improve fitness and even reduce your risk of dying.

Don't feel like it's too late to start an exercise program. In fact, people in their 90s can benefit from physical activity. While exercising won't cure all that ails you and ensure longevity, it can increase your odds of staying healthier and more independent.

The Surgeon General's Office recommends 30 minutes of accumulated physical activity most days of the week. Here's a guide to getting started and staying motivated.

- Remind yourself of the benefits of exercising.
- Do what feels good. Choose an activity that you like and you'll be more likely to stick with it.
- Divide your activities into small increments if you don't have enough time to devote to a longer exercise session. For example, take a 10-minute walk at lunch and after dinner.
- Ease into it. Work with your doctor to develop an exercise regimen that won't be too difficult. Don't expect to start with rigorous activities.
- Eat well. Be sure you are getting enough nutrients to help you exercise more efficiently.

SAFETY CONCERNS

Always talk to your health care provider before beginning an exercise program. You

may have questions as to how much exercise you can do and if it will impact any conditions you may already have.

Exercise has been discouraged in people with certain chronic conditions. But if you have a chronic condition, there may be times when the disease is stable and exercise might be beneficial. Discuss troublesome symptoms or disease exacerbations with your doctor and ask about exercising during symptom-free periods.

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INTENSITY

If you are a man over 40 or a woman over 50, check with your doctor first if you plan to start doing vigorous physical activities. Vigorous activity could be a problem for people who have heart disease but don't know it because they don't have any symptoms.

Listen to your body to determine if an activity is considered vigorous. For example, if the activity makes you breathe and sweat hard (if you tend to sweat, that is), it is vigorous.

For some conditions, vigorous exercise is dangerous and should not be done, even when you aren't experiencing symptoms.

TYPES OF ACTIVITY

The vast amount of exercise information may make it confusing to discern which types of activities will work best for you. According to "Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging," the NIA sug-

gests that four types of exercises can help older adults gain health benefits:

Endurance exercises increase your breathing and heart rate, improving the health of your heart, lungs and circulatory system. Having more endurance keeps you healthier and improves your stamina for daily tasks, such as climbing stairs and grocery shopping. Endurance exercises also may delay or prevent many diseases associated with aging (diabetes, colon cancer, heart disease and stroke) and can reduce overall death and hospitalization rates.

Strength exercises build your muscles and give you more strength to be independent. Even small muscle increases make a big difference in ability, especially in frail people. Strength exercises also increase your metabolism, enhancing weight management.

Balance exercises help prevent falls, which are a major cause of broken hips and other injuries that often lead to disability. Some balance exercises are geared at strengthening leg muscles while others require you to do simple activities like briefly standing on one leg.

Flexibility exercises stretch your muscles and the tissues that hold your body's structures in place. Physical therapists and other health professionals recommend certain stretching exercises to help patients recover from injuries and prevent injuries. Flexibility may also play a part in preventing falls.

Regardless of the types of exercises you do, stay tuned to your body. If it doesn't feel right, don't do it. Remember to have regular discussions about exercising with your health care provider. ■

Information adapted from:

- AARP home page. Accessed via www.aarp.org.
- National Institute on Aging. Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging. Accessed via www.nia.nih.gov/exercisebook/.

NOTES:

The purpose of this patient education handout is to further explain or remind you about a medical condition. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, be sure to discuss them with your health care provider. This handout may be reproduced for distribution to patients.

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