A Report of the Surgeon General

Physical Activity and Health

Persons with Disabilities

Key Messages

- Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits.
- Significant health benefits can be obtained with a moderate amount of physical activity, preferably daily. The same moderate amount of activity can be obtained in longer sessions of moderately intense activities (such as 30–40 minutes of wheeling oneself in a wheelchair) or in shorter sessions of more strenuous activities (such as 20 minutes of wheelchair basketball).
- Additional health benefits can be gained through greater amounts of physical activity. People who can maintain a regular routine of physical activity that is of longer duration or of greater intensity are likely to derive greater benefit.
- Previously sedentary people who begin physical activity programs should start with short intervals of physical activity (5–10 minutes) and gradually build up to the desired level of activity.
- People with disabilities should first consult a physician before beginning a program of physical activity to which they are unaccustomed.
- The emphasis on moderate amounts of physical activity makes it possible to vary activities to meet individual needs, preferences, and life circumstances.

Facts

- People with disabilities are less likely to engage in regular moderate physical activity than people without disabilities, yet they have similar needs to promote their health and prevent unnecessary disease.
- Social support from family and friends has been consistently and positively related to regular physical activity.

Benefits of Physical Activity

- Reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease and of developing high blood pressure, colon cancer, and diabetes.
- Can help people with chronic, disabling conditions improve their stamina and muscle strength.
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, improves mood, and promotes general feelings of well-being.
- Helps control joint swelling and pain associated with arthritis.
- Can help reduce blood pressure in some people with hypertension.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

The Nation's Prevention Agency
CDC 50
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

What Communities Can Do

- Provide community-based programs to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Ensure that environments and facilities conducive to being physically active are available and accessible to people with disabilities, such as offering safe, accessible, and attractive trails for bicycling, walking, and wheelchair activities.
- Ensure that people with disabilities are involved at all stages of planning and implementing community physical activity programs.
- Provide quality, preferably daily, K–12 accessible physical education classes for children and youths with disabilities.
- Encourage health care providers to talk routinely to their patients with disabilities about incorporating physical activity into their lives.

For more information contact:

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