

Physical Activity and Weight Control

WIN *Weight-control Information Network*

Physical Activity and Weight Control

Physical activity is important for physical health, emotional well-being, and achieving a healthy weight. Physical activity may help you control your weight by using excess calories that would otherwise be stored as fat. Most foods and many beverages you eat and drink contain calories, and everything you do uses calories. This includes sleeping, breathing, digesting food, and of course, moving around. Balancing the calories you eat with the calories you use through physical activity may help you maintain your current weight.



Calories in Food > Calories Used = Weight Gain
Calories in Food < Calories Used = Weight Loss
Calories in Food = Calories Used = Weight Control

How much physical activity do I need for general health?

Experts recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. This amount of physical activity may reduce your risk for some chronic diseases.

Regular physical activity may help you reach and maintain a healthy weight. Being physically active may also make you more energetic, improve your mood, and reduce the risk of developing some chronic diseases.

To lose weight, experts recommend that you do 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity on most days of the week. In addition, you should follow a nutritious eating plan and consume fewer calories than you burn each day. Remember that your weight may be affected by the balance of “calories-in” and “calories-out.”

In order to maintain your weight after weight loss, experts recommend that you do 60 to 90 minutes of daily moderate-intensity physical activity while continuing to eat nutritious foods that do not exceed your calorie requirements. Studies show that physical activity is very important to successful long-term weight control.

People may need to do different amounts of physical activity to lose and control weight. You may find that you need to do more, or that you may not need to do as much. Also, remember that your eating plan and the number of calories you eat are important. You may wish to speak with your health care provider, a fitness specialist, or a dietitian about the right amount of activity and calories for you.

In addition, you can use the “MyPyramid” educational tool from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to find out how much activity and how many calories you need. The MyPyramid website allows users to enter information such as age, gender, weight, and current activity level to determine a personalized physical activity and eating plan. The website also provides information related to physical activity and nutrition. It is available at <http://www.mypyramid.gov>.

Becoming Physically Active

Physical activity may include structured activities, such as walking, jogging, strength training, or sports. It may also include daily activities, such as household chores, yard work, or walking the dog. Pick a combination of structured and daily activities that fits your schedule.

If you have been inactive for a while, start slowly and work up to at least 30 minutes per day at a pace that is comfortable for you. If you are unable to be active for 30 minutes at one time, accumulate activity over the course of the day in 10- to 15-minute sessions. For example, whether you take three 10-minute walks or walk for 30 minutes all at once, you will achieve the same health benefits.

Health Benefits of Physical Activity

Regular physical activity may help control your weight and may help:

- Reduce your risk of or manage chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol, heart disease, osteoporosis, arthritis, and some cancers.
- Build strong muscles, bones, and joints.
- Improve flexibility.
- Ward off depression.
- Improve mood and sense of well-being.

If you want to lose weight, you may need to do more than 30 minutes of physical activity per day. Remember that you can be active in several shorter sessions, and that your daily activities count towards calories used.

Aerobic Activity

One way to meet your physical activity goals is by participating in aerobic activities. Aerobic exercise includes any activity that makes you breathe hard and increases your heart rate for a sustained period of time. Common aerobic activities include walking, swimming, and bicycling.

Experts recommend moderate-intensity exercise. This pace may make you breathe harder and make it more difficult to talk, but you should still be able to carry on a conversation. If you are just beginning, slowly work up to moving at a moderate-intensity pace.

Strength Training

Strength training is another way for you to meet the recommended minimum of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each day. Strength training will help you burn extra calories, build strong muscles, bones, and joints, and improve your physical functioning.

Experts recommend strength training 2 to 3 days each week, with 1 full day of rest between workouts to allow your muscles to recover. If you are new to strength training or physical activity in general, consider hiring a certified personal trainer who can plan an individualized program to help you work out safely and effectively. A personal trainer who has a degree in exercise physiology or is certified through a national certification program, such as the American College of Sports Medicine or National Strength and Conditioning Association, may be able to help you reach your physical activity goals.

Mind and Body Exercise

In addition to aerobic activity and strength training, you may wish to include other forms of exercise in your physical activity program. Alternatives to traditional exercise provide variety and fun. They may also help reduce stress, increase muscular strength and flexibility, and increase energy levels. Examples of these exercises include yoga, Pilates, and tai chi.

Get Started!

Here are some ideas to help you start your physical activity program:

- Take a brisk walk around the block with family, friends, or coworkers.
- Walk up the stairs instead of taking the elevator when it is safe to do so.
- Mow the lawn.
- Take an activity break at work or home. Get up, stretch, and walk around.
- Park your car farther away from entrances of stores, movie theatres, or your home and walk the extra distance when it is safe to do so.
- Take a beginner's level low-impact aerobics or step class.

Tips for a Safe and Successful Physical Activity Program

- **Check with your health care provider.** If you have a chronic health problem, such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, or high blood pressure, ask your health care provider about what type and amount of physical activity is right for you.
- **Start slowly.** Incorporate more physical activity into your daily routine and gradually work up to 30 minutes per day to improve health, 60 minutes per day to lose weight, or 60 to 90 minutes per day to manage weight.
- **Set goals.** Set both short-term and long-term goals to keep motivated.
- **Set rewards.** Celebrate every success—you earned it!
- **Track progress.** Keep an activity log to track your progress. Note when you worked out, what activity you did, how long you did the activity, and how you felt during your workout. Also, record the days that you did not workout and what may have caused you to change your routine.
- **Think variety.** Choose a variety of physical activities to help you meet your goals, prevent boredom, and keep your mind and body challenged.
- **Be comfortable.** Wear comfortable shoes and clothes that are appropriate to the activity you will be doing.
- **Listen to your body.** Stop exercising and consult your health care provider if you experience chest discomfort or pain, dizziness, severe headache, or other unusual symptoms while you work out. If pain does not go away, get medical help right away. If you are feeling fatigued or sick, take time off from your routine to rest. You can ease back into your program when you start feeling better.
- **Eat nutritious foods.** Choose a variety of nutritious foods every day. Remember that your health and weight depend on both your eating plan and physical activity level. Healthful foods will give you the energy you need to be active.
- **Get support.** Encourage your family and friends to support you and join you in your activity. Form walking groups with coworkers, play with your children outside, or take a dance class with friends.

Regular physical activity may help you feel and move better. Whether your goal is to achieve and maintain a healthy weight or improve your health, becoming physically active is a step in the right direction. It is never too early or too late to make physical activity a part of your life!

Keep Moving!

Move at your own pace while you enjoy some of these activities:

- brisk walking
- jogging
- bicycling
- swimming
- aerobic exercise classes (step aerobics, kick boxing, high- or low-impact aerobics)
- dancing (square dancing, salsa, African dance, swing)
- playing sports (tennis, basketball, soccer)

Additional Reading From the Weight-control Information Network

- *Active at Any Size*. National Institutes of Health (NIH) Publication No. 00-4352.
- *Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan: Better Health and You*. NIH Publication No. 02-4992 (available in English and Spanish).
- *Walking...A Step in the Right Direction*. NIH Publication No. 01-4155.
- *Weight Loss for Life*. NIH Publication No. 04-3700.

Additional Resources

American College of Sports Medicine

P.O. Box 1440
Indianapolis, IN 46206-1440
Phone: (317) 637-9200
Internet: <http://www.acsm.org>

National Strength and Conditioning Association

1955 N. Union Boulevard
Colorado Springs, CO 80909
Phone: (719) 632-6722
Toll-free: 1-800-815-6826
Internet: <http://www.nasca-lift.org>

The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

Department W
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Room 738-H
Washington, DC 20201-0004
Phone: (202) 690-9000
Internet: <http://www.fitness.gov>

Websites

American Heart Association

Just Move
Internet: <http://www.justmove.org>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Aim for a Healthy Weight
Internet: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

Get Strong!

Build strong muscles and bones with strengthening exercises. Try:

- Lifting free weights or using weight machines.
- Using resistance bands.
- Using stability or medicine balls.
- Doing push-ups and abdominal crunches.

National Institutes of Health

We Can! (Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity & Nutrition)

Internet: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/index.htm>

Shape Up America!

Internet: <http://www.shapeup.org>

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

MyPyramid

Internet: <http://www.mypyramid.gov>

USDA

MyPyramid for Kids

Internet: <http://www.mypyramid.gov/kids/index.html>

Inclusion of resources is for information only and does not imply endorsement by NIDDK or WIN.

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The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health, which is the Federal Government’s lead agency responsible for biomedical research on nutrition and obesity. Authorized by Congress (Public Law 103–43), WIN provides the general public, health professionals, the media, and Congress with up-to-date, science-based health information on weight control, obesity, physical activity, and related nutritional issues.

Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This fact sheet was also reviewed by Steven Blair, P.E.D.

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