

Active Living

Engaging in regular physical activity is one of the most important things that people of all ages can do to improve their health. Physical activity strengthens bones and muscles, reduces stress and depression, and makes it easier to maintain a healthy body weight or to reduce weight if overweight or obese.²¹⁴ Even people who do not lose weight get substantial benefits from regular physical activity, including lower rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer.²¹⁵ Healthy physical activity includes aerobic activity, muscle strengthening activities, and activities to increase balance and flexibility. As described by the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, adults should engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week, and children and teenagers should engage in at least one hour of activity each day.²¹⁴

KEY FACTS

- At least 40 percent of adults and 80 percent of adolescents do not meet the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.²¹⁴
- Less than 4 percent of elementary schools, 8 percent of middle schools, and 2 percent of high schools provide opportunities for daily physical education.²¹⁶
- Only 13 percent of children walk or bike to school, compared with 44 percent a generation ago.²¹⁷
- The average 8- to 18-year-old is exposed to nearly 7.5 hours of passive screen time (e.g., television, videos, computers, smart phones, video games) every day.²¹⁸
- More than a quarter of trips made by car are within one mile of home.²¹⁹
- Physical activity levels are lower in low-income communities and among racial/ethnic minority children due in part to people feeling unsafe in their communities.²²⁰
- Activity levels decline with age, despite physical (e.g., falls prevention) and emotional (e.g., decreased levels of depression) benefits.²²¹
- Physical inactivity is a primary contributor to one-third of the adult population being overweight or obese and one in six children and adolescents being obese.²²²

Recommendations: What can be done?

Personal, social, economic, and environmental factors all influence physical activity levels among youth, adults, and seniors. Americans should live, work, and learn in environments that provide safe and accessible options for physical activity, regardless of age, income level, or disability status.

1 Encourage community design and development that supports physical activity.

Sidewalks, adequate lighting, and traffic slowing devices (e.g., modern roundabouts) improve the walkability of communities and promote physical activity.²²³ Increasing access to public transportation helps people maintain active lifestyles.²²⁴ People are also more likely to use active modes of transportation (e.g., walking, biking) for their daily activities when homes, workplaces, stores, schools, health care facilities, and other community services are located within close proximity and neighborhoods are perceived as safe.²²⁵

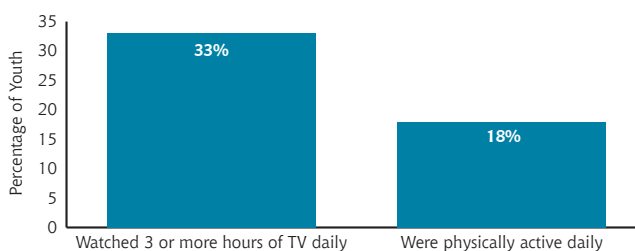
2 Promote and strengthen school and early learning policies and programs that increase physical activity.

Schools, early learning centers, and before- and after-school programs can all adopt standards, policies, and programs that support active lifestyles.²²⁶ Programs that increase the length or quality (i.e., time spent being active) of school-based physical education improve overall student activity levels and academic performance.²²⁷

3 Facilitate access to safe, accessible, and affordable places for physical activity.

Safe, accessible, and affordable places for physical activity (e.g., parks, playgrounds, community centers, schools, fitness centers, trails, gardens) can increase activity levels.²²⁸ Ensuring availability of transportation and developing these places with universal design features facilitates access and use by people of all ages and functional abilities.²²⁹ Public areas that are well-lit and patrolled by law enforcement have been shown to make communities safer and increase use of these places for physical activity.²³⁰ Implementing joint use or after-hours agreements for school gymnasiums and community recreation centers increases the use of these facilities

More Youth Watch 3 Hours of TV than Exercise



Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, CDC, 2009

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Safe Routes to School

Community leaders, schools, and parents across the United States are encouraging more children, including children with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school. Safe Routes to School programs improve safety and accessibility as well as reduce traffic and air pollution in the vicinity of schools. As a result, these programs help make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation choice, thus encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age.

by community members.²³¹ In addition, providing opportunities for older adults to participate in physical activity (e.g., low-cost fitness classes at community centers) promotes functional health, lowers the risk of falls, and improves cognitive function.²³²

4 Support workplace policies and programs that increase physical activity.

Effective workplace programs and policies can reduce health risks and improve the quality of life for millions of U.S. workers.²³³ Workplace initiatives such as flextime policies, lunchtime walking groups, and access to fitness facilities, bicycle racks, walking paths, and changing facilities with showers can increase the number of employees who are physically active during the work day.²³⁴

5 Assess physical activity levels and provide education, counseling, and referrals.

Health professionals in a variety of settings can provide education, counseling, and referrals to community resources to help people lead more active lifestyles.²³⁵ Programs that are tailored to individual interests and preferences can be more effective in increasing physical activity.²³⁶

Actions

The Federal Government will

- Promote the development of transportation options and systems that encourage active transportation and accommodate diverse needs.
- Support adoption of active living principles in community design, such as mixed land use, compact design, and inclusion of safe and accessible parks and green space.
- Support coordinated, comprehensive, and multicomponent programs and policies to encourage physical activity and physical education, especially in schools and early learning centers.

- Develop and disseminate clinical guidelines, best practices, and tools on increasing physical activity and reducing the number of overweight and obese individuals.

Partners Can State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Governments can

- Design safe neighborhoods that encourage physical activity (e.g., include sidewalks, bike lanes, adequate lighting, multi-use trails, walkways, and parks).
- Convene partners (e.g., urban planners, architects, engineers, developers, transportation, law enforcement, public health) to consider health impacts when making transportation or land use decisions.
- Support schools and early learning centers in meeting physical activity guidelines.

Businesses and Employers can

- Adopt policies and programs that promote walking, bicycling, and use of public transportation (e.g., provide access to fitness equipment and facilities, bicycle racks, walking paths, and changing facilities with showers).
- Design or redesign communities to promote opportunities for active transportation (e.g., include places for physical activity in building and development plans).
- Sponsor a new or existing park, playground, or trail, recreation or scholastic program, or beautification or maintenance project.

Moderate-Intensity Physical Activity

Moderate-intensity activities include brisk walking, bicycling, dancing, swimming, basketball, tennis, water aerobics, mowing the lawn, and general gardening. Aerobic activity should be supplemented with resistance training for muscular strength and endurance.

Key Indicators	Current	10-Year Target
Proportion of adults who meet physical activity guidelines for aerobic physical activity	43.5%	47.9%
Proportion of adolescents who meet physical activity guidelines for aerobic physical activity	18.4%	20.2%
Proportion of the nation's public and private schools that provide access to their physical activity spaces and facilities for all persons outside of normal school hours	28.8%	31.7%
Proportion of commuters who use active transportation (i.e., walk, bicycle, and public transit) to travel to work	8.7%	20.0%

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PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: America's Great Outdoors

America's Great Outdoors promotes efforts to conserve outdoor spaces and to reconnect Americans to the outdoors. It supports local efforts such as the Piedmont Environmental Council of Virginia which promotes active living by supporting efficient transportation networks that connect people in both urban and rural communities to parks and other outdoor recreation venues.

Health Care Systems, Insurers, and Clinicians can

- Conduct physical activity assessments, provide counseling, and refer patients to allied health care or health and fitness professionals.
- Support clinicians in implementing physical activity assessments, counseling, and referrals (e.g., provide training to clinicians, implement clinical reminder systems).

Early Learning Centers, Schools, Colleges, and Universities can

- Provide daily physical education and recess that focuses on maximizing time physically active.
- Participate in fitness testing (e.g., the President's Challenge) and support individualized self improvement plans.
- Support walk and bike to schools programs (e.g., "Safe Routes to School") and work with local governments to make decisions about selecting school sites that can promote physical activity.
- Limit passive screen time.
- Make physical activity facilities available to the local community.

Community, Non-Profit, and Faith-Based Organizations can

- Offer low or no-cost physical activity programs (e.g., intramural sports, physical activity clubs).
- Develop and institute policies and joint use agreements that address liability concerns and encourage shared use of physical activity facilities (e.g., school gymnasiums, community recreation centers).
- Offer opportunities for physical activity across the lifespan (e.g., aerobic and muscle strengthening exercise classes for seniors).

Individuals and Families can

- Engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week (adults) or at least one hour of activity each day (children).
- Supplement aerobic activities with muscle strengthening activities on two or more days a week that involve all major muscle groups.
- Consider following the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommendations for limiting TV time among children.

KEY DOCUMENTS

- Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans
- The White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to the President

