

## How Can Physical Activity Become a Way of Life?

If you aren't in the habit of being physically active, your health care team is probably telling you to start. That's because regular physical activity can lower your risk for many health conditions. But the benefits don't stop there. You may look and feel better, become stronger and more flexible, have more energy, and reduce stress and tension.

Aim for at least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity. Your activity should be spread throughout the week. You should also do muscle-strengthening activities at least two days a week.

If you have a chronic condition or disability that prevents you from doing this amount or type of activity, you can still find ways to be physically active based on your abilities.



### What can physical activity do for me?

Regular physical activity is associated with lower risk of:

- Heart disease
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- High LDL (bad) total cholesterol
- Weight gain or obesity
- Diabetes

Other benefits include:

- Strengthened lungs, bones and muscles
- Increased energy
- Reduced stress
- Improved sleep
- Feeling better about how you look
- Improved range of motion and balance
- Increased independence

### How do I get started?

If physical activity isn't already part of your daily routine, don't worry. There are simple steps you can take to get started.

- Start slowly — don't overdo it! Walking is a great way to start moving more.
- Choose activities you enjoy.
- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes.
- Use the buddy system! Ask a friend to start a program with you.

### What kind of activities should I do?

Small changes you can make to fit in more physical activity include:

- Taking a 10-15 minute break at work to walk
- Using the stairs instead of escalators or elevators
- Parking farther from a store, or getting off the bus early
- Walking or biking instead of driving when you can

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Start slowly with light or moderate exercises for short periods and gradually increase the intensity and length of time.

Consider activities such as:

- Hiking
- Jogging
- Biking outside
- Using a stationary bike
- Swimming
- Rowing
- Dancing

Note the days you exercise. Write down the distance or length of time you workout and keep track of how you feel after each session.

You can also improve your activity level at home doing housework, gardening and yardwork.

You don't have to join a gym or buy your own equipment to fit in physical activity. You can take advantage of some of these low- or no-cost local community resources that can offer access to safe places to exercise:

- YMCA
- Community centers or senior centers
- Parks and recreation department
- Faith-based organizations

### What will keep me going?

- Identify your exercise preferences — alone or with others, indoors or outdoors — and the best time of day for you.
- Choose activities you enjoy and make sure they're convenient. Have a backup plan for poor weather, such as walking in a mall on rainy days.
- Join an exercise group, health club or local community center. Choose a program that fits your schedule.
- Do different activities each day. Take a brisk walk one day, go swimming the next, and go for a bike ride on the weekend.
- Focus on your progress and don't compare yourself to others. Instead, remember why you started and how far you've come.
- Make physical activity a routine so it becomes a habit.
- Get your family involved! It's easier to build healthy habits together.

## HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [heart.org](http://heart.org) to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at [HeartInsight.org](http://HeartInsight.org).
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/SupportNetwork](http://heart.org/SupportNetwork).

### Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

**Are there activities that I should avoid?**

**What's the best type of physical activity for me?**

### MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit [heart.org/AnswersByHeart](http://heart.org/AnswersByHeart) to learn more.