



MDwise

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Fitness: Adding More Activity to Your Life

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Introduction

If you have decided to get more active, congratulations! Making that decision is an important first step in becoming a healthier person.

Keep these key points in mind:

- Being fit helps you look and feel your best and reduces your risk for a heart attack, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and some cancers.
- Knowing why you want to get more active can help you make a change.
- Start with small, short-term goals that you can reach pretty easily. It's easier to stick to something new when you have early, frequent successes.
- Support from family and friends can go a long way toward helping you find success in becoming more active. Don't be afraid to let them know what you're trying to do—and ask for their help.
- If you're worried about how more activity might affect your health, have a checkup before you start. Follow any special advice that your doctor gives you for getting a smart start.

How do you start getting active?

As we said before, you're not as likely to succeed if you jump in too far too fast. In this section, you'll learn about the steps to follow in setting up an exercise plan.

- Set your goals.
- Pick an activity, and prepare for it.
- Think about your barriers.
- Get support—from others and from yourself.

Set your goals

When you are clear about your reasons for wanting to get active, it's time to set your goals.

What is your long-term goal? A long-term goal is something you want to reach in 6 to 12 months. For example, someone who isn't active at all right now may have a goal of entering an organized 5-kilometer walk

in 6 months.

Whatever you choose for your goal, experts recommend doing either of these things to get and stay healthy:¹

- Moderate activity for at least 2½ hours a week. Moderate activity means things like brisk walking, brisk cycling, or shooting baskets. But any activities that raise your heart rate and make you breathe harder—including daily chores—can be included.
- Vigorous activity for at least 1¼ hours a week. Vigorous activity means things like jogging, cycling fast, cross-country skiing, or playing a basketball game. You breathe faster and your heart beats much faster with this kind of activity.

It's fine to be active in several blocks of 10 minutes or more throughout your day and week. And you can choose to do one or both types of activity.

If you decide to aim for these recommendations, what are the short-term goals that will help you get there? Short-term goals are things you want to do tomorrow and the day after.

For example, if you want to build up to walking 30 minutes every day, you might start by walking just 10 minutes a day, a few days a week. After a week, you can set a new goal by adding just a few minutes every day or adding another day to your schedule.

Read more about setting goals.

Here are some quick tips about activity goals:

- Stretch, breathe, and lift. Think about doing things in three areas:
 - Stretching, for flexibility. Do all stretches gradually. Don't push or bounce the stretch. You should feel a stretch, not pain.
 - Aerobic exercise like walking, for your heart, lungs, and muscle tone
 - Muscle strength and endurance, for strong bones and muscles
- Talk, don't sing. If you can talk while you're being active, you're moving at a good pace. If you can sing, you might want to pick up the pace a bit.
- Don't forget—any activity counts, as long as it makes you breathe harder and gets your heart pumping.

Pick an activity and prepare for it

- Ask yourself questions to find out what your physical activity preferences and attitudes are.
 - Fitness: Choosing Activities That Are Right for You
- Pick an activity that you enjoy or think you might enjoy. You're more likely to keep doing something you like. Walk the dog. Use the stairs. Do some gardening.
 - Quick Tips: Getting Active as a Family
 - Quick Tips: Getting Active at Home
- Be sure to have the correct clothing and gear.
- Learn about fitness machines you may use, like a treadmill or stair-climber.
- Learn the proper way to do your activity, and be aware of any safety concerns.

For ideas on fitting more activity into your day, see the topic [Fitness: Getting and Staying Active](#).

Think about barriers

Take the time to think about what things could get in the way of your success. We call these things barriers. And by thinking about them now, you can plan ahead for how to deal with them if they happen. Read more about common barriers and what you can do about them.

Here are some tips for dealing with barriers:

- It's perfectly normal to try something, stop it, and then get mad at yourself. Lots of people try and try again before they reach their goals.
- If you feel like giving up, don't waste energy feeling bad about yourself. Remember your reason for wanting to change, think about the progress you've made, and give yourself a pep talk and a pat on the back. Then you may feel like going for a walk.
- When you hit a barrier—and most people do—get support. Talk to your family members and friends to see if someone wants to be active with you or cheer you on. If you have concerns about your health, talk to your doctor to make sure that you're doing your activities safely.
- Don't forget little rewards. Something to look forward to can keep you moving right along.

It might help you to write down your goals and your barriers .

Get support—from others and from yourself

The more support you have, the easier it is to exercise.

If your family members tell you that they love how you're getting healthier, you'll probably be motivated to bound up the stairs at work or walk an extra 10 minutes.

And there's more support out there. You can even ask for encouragement. Here are a few things to look for:

- Walk or do your activities with a partner. It's motivating to know that someone is counting on you. That person can remind you how good it feels to exercise or how far you've come. And that person can even motivate you with what he or she has accomplished.
- Friends and family may be a great resource. They can exercise with you or encourage you by saying how they admire you. Friends can tell you how good you look because you're exercising. Don't be afraid to tell family and friends that their encouragement makes a big difference to you.
- You might join a class or workout group. People in these groups often have some of the same barriers you have. They can give you support when you don't feel like exercising. They can boost your morale when you need a lift.
- Join an online support group. Or use a smartphone fitness app. Many apps are free, and they can help you track your progress.
- Give yourself positive reinforcement. Reward yourself! Buy new workout clothes, take yourself to the movies, or treat yourself to a new DVD. Do whatever it takes to remind yourself that you've been meeting your goals. You're successful!
- Your doctor or a fitness professional can help you plan a routine and learn proper form and technique. He or she can help you track progress toward your health goals.

You might find a fitness professional at a local health club or in phone listings. When deciding on fitness professionals, ask about how they were trained and what certifications they have. Check into experience and ask for a few references.

Support is everywhere. You just have to look for it.

References

Citations

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2008). *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* (ODPHP Publication No. U0036). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Available online: <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/default.aspx>.

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