

Physical Activity FAQs

Q: Why should I exercise?

A: There are a number of reasons, both short term and long term, to engage in physical activity. In the short term, physical activity can help reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, control weight, and promote psychological well-being. In the long term, physically active people have a lower risk of dying prematurely and of developing diseases like heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and colon cancer. It also helps to build healthy bones, muscles, and joints to prevent injuries.

Q: How long do I have to exercise to get these benefits?

A: The Surgeon General recommends 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise on most, or all, days of the week. Moderate intensity exercise includes walking 2 miles in 30 minutes, running 1.5 miles in 15 minutes, bicycling 5 miles in 30 minutes, or playing basketball for 15-20 minutes. This is just for health, though. If you have other goals, you may need a different plan.

Q: I want to improve my cardiovascular fitness. Do I have to run?

A: While running is one way to become more fit, it is not the only way. Any movement that gets your heart rate up and makes you breathe harder will increase your fitness level. Some suggestions include dancing, swimming, biking, or rowing. The most important thing is to choose something you like and stick with it.

Q: How hard do I have to work to increase my fitness level?

A: If you're healthy you can improve your cardiovascular fitness by staying in a heart rate zone of 55-90% of your maximum heart rate. Your maximum heart rate can be estimated by subtracting your age from 220. Depending on your current fitness level, choose a target heart rate that is comfortable for you. Another easy test to find out if you're working hard enough is called the "talk test." You want to be working hard enough that you can't sing, but not so hard that you can't talk.

Q: Is one kind of aerobic activity better for weight loss than others?

A: Yes and no. Generally speaking, activities that require you to carry your own weight, such as walking or stair climbing, use more calories than those that support your weight for you, like biking. However, the most important part of weight loss is just doing something. So if you can't stand walking, but you love to bike, then biking is your answer because it's far better than doing nothing at all. You may just have to do a little longer to burn the same amount of calories. You also want to be sure to choose something that you like to do and will be able to stick with.

Q: Do I need a sports drink?

A: Probably not. Unless you're going to be doing aerobic activities for more than an hour, sports drinks don't help you. Water is a great choice for staying hydrated. Just remember to drink it!

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