

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

Tips for safe physical activity

Physical activity is good for your health at every age. If you have never been active, starting regular physical activity now can improve your strength, staying power, and flexibility. Being active can help you live on your own for a longer time and lower your chance of getting type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and colon cancer. Whatever activity you choose, follow the safety tips below:

- Ask your health care provider about ways you can safely increase the amount of physical activity you do now.
- Take time to warm up, cool down, and stretch.
- Start slowly and build up to more intense activity.
- Stop the activity if you feel pain.
- Drink plenty of water.
- When you are active outdoors, wear lightweight clothes in the summer and layers of clothing in the winter.
- Wear sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat for sun protection.
- Wear shoes that fit well and are right for your activity.

Getting active

To get started, pick an activity you enjoy. Begin with small, specific goals such as "I will take a 10-minute walk three times this week." Slowly increase the length of time and the number of days you are active.



You can benefit most from a combination of aerobic, strength, balance, and flexibility activities. Build up to 30 minutes or more of aerobic activity on most days of the week. Try to do balance and flexibility activities daily as well. Work toward doing strength exercises on 2 or 3 days a week.

Aerobic activities

- walking
- swimming
- housework or gardening
- active play with children

Regular aerobic activity can help you to:

- Lose or maintain your weight by burning calories
 - Lower your risk of heart disease and stroke by strengthening your heart and lowering your blood pressure and cholesterol
 - Keep your joints moving and reduce your arthritis pain
 - Lower your stress and boost your mood
 - Have more energy
 - Meet new friends by joining a class or walking group.
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Strengthening activities

- lifting weights
- push-ups or sit-ups
- household or garden tasks that make you lift or dig

Doing strengthening activities regularly can help you to:

- Keep your muscles and bones strong as you age
- Increase your strength and independence
- Reduce your need for a cane
- Reduce the risk of bone fractures and other injuries, or recover faster if you are injured
- Maintain or lose weight because muscle burns more calories than body fat.



Balance activities

- walking heel to toe in straight line
- standing on one foot
- standing up from a chair and sitting down again without using your hands

Doing balance activities regularly can help you to:

- Stay steady on your feet
- Avoid falls.



Flexibility activities ***Doing flexibility activities regularly can help you to:***

- *stretching*
- *yoga*
- Maintain the movement of your muscles and joints
- Prevent stiffness as you age
- Prevent injuries
- Lower your stress.

Many activities give you more than just one benefit. For example, doing chair aerobics using hand weights gives you aerobic and strengthening benefits. Yoga combines balance, flexibility, and strengthening benefits. You do not have to do four separate types of activities each week. Choose what you like to do and round out your activities from there. Remember, any amount of physical activity you do is better than none.

Work physical activity into your day

There are plenty of ways to be active without setting aside a special time for "exercise." The tips below can help you to add more activity into your everyday life.

- Take short walks throughout your day. Try a 10-minute walk before breakfast, at lunchtime, and after dinner.
- Ride your bike to visit a friend who lives nearby.
- Clean your house or garage, or wash your car.


