

Exercise And Health

Benefits of exercise

Exercise has many benefits. Our bodies thrive on regular physical activity. Exercise provides both physical and emotional rewards. Exercise can:

- ? decrease your blood pressure
- ? decrease your total blood cholesterol
- ? decrease your blood sugar.

These physical effects decrease the risk of stroke, heart disease, and diabetes.

Among the emotional benefits of exercise are:

- ? improved sense of well-being
- ? increased emotional stamina
- ? improved sleep.

Exercise affects our brain chemistry. For example, exercise can help treat mild depression.

Finally, exercise increases the body's metabolic rate. Regular exercise can raise the number of calories your body uses for some time, even after you have finished your activity.

Types of exercise

Aerobic exercise, which involves continuous activity, increases endurance and helps your body use oxygen more effectively. Your lungs work harder to bring in more oxygen and your heart pumps harder to send blood to the muscles. This process strengthens your lungs, heart, and muscles. Running, swimming, and dancing are types of aerobic exercise.

Aerobic activities that increase cardiovascular fitness include:

- ? walking briskly
- ? swimming
- ? running
- ? jogging
- ? climbing stairs
- ? using a stationary bicycle
- ? bicycling
- ? vigorous dancing
- ? ice skating or roller skating
- ? aerobics, regular or low impact
- ? cross-country skiing
- ? rowing.

Other types of exercise, such as weight lifting and stretching, can improve muscle strength and flexibility. Such exercise improves endurance, dexterity, and balance.

Exercises performed at low and moderate intensity will help you stay fit and healthy. You do not need to exercise strenuously to improve your health. For example, regular, moderate activity, such as three 10-minute walks a day, reduces your risk of death from disease by as much as 60%.

Try to build up to 30 minutes of exercise a day on most days each week.

Choosing an exercise program

Before beginning an exercise program, consider the following questions:

- ? What physical activities do you enjoy?
- ? Do you prefer group or individual activities?
- ? What kind of program best fits your schedule?
- ? Do you have any physical conditions that limit your choice of exercise program? For example, if you have arthritis, exercise is an important part of the overall treatment. Ask your doctor about ways to exercise, including range-of-motion exercises.

The following table can help you plan your exercise program. It lists average calories burned for different activities.

| Calories Burned Per Minute | Activity |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2 to 2.5 | Standing |
| 2.5 to 4 | Walking 2 miles an hour |
| | Bicycling 5 miles an hour |
| 4 to 5 | Walking 3 miles an hour |
| | Bicycling 6 miles an hour |
| | Badminton |
| | Housework |
| 5 to 6 | Walking 4 miles an hour |
| | Dancing |
| | Raking leaves |
| | Calisthenics |
| | Tennis (doubles) |

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| 6 to 7 | Bicycling 10 miles an hour Skating Shoveling dirt Sexual activity |
| 7 to 8 | Walking briskly 5 miles an hour Tennis (singles) Shoveling snow Downhill skiing Water-skiing |
| 8 to 10 | Jogging 5 miles an hour Bicycling 12 miles an hour Basketball Mountain-climbing Ditch-digging |
| 10 to 11 | Jogging 6 miles an hour Cross-country skiing Squash and handball |
| 12 | Swimming |

Warm-Up and Cool-Down Exercises

You should include warm-up and cool-down exercises before and after aerobic exercise. Muscles that have not been used are cool. Stretching and other low-intensity exercise performed for 5 to 10 minutes warms your muscles, making them more flexible and less prone to injury. Your choice of stretches depends on the type of exercise you plan to do. Hold each stretch for 30 seconds and do not bounce.

Right after exercise, allow your heart rate to return slowly to normal. Stretch the muscles used during your exercise. Walking slowly, for example, will let you cool down and allow your heart and breathing to return to normal levels. After stretching, your muscles will be more flexible and less stiff. Devote a total of 5 to 10 minutes to cooling down. You can use warm-up exercises for cool-down exercises.