

Staying Active

Advantages to Staying Active

Keeping up with an active lifestyle will make you feel better and reduce your risks of chronic disease throughout your life. Even after you achieve your weight loss goals, maintaining moderate activity as part of your daily routine will help you keep the weight off and also keep you stronger and healthier.

Feeling Younger

A healthy lifestyle cannot stop the aging process, but it can slow the process down and make you feel 10 years younger than you actually are. When evaluated through a variety of health and fitness tests, bodies of active adults appear to be younger physically than the bodies of their couch potato peers. In addition to physical fitness, active adults also see the benefits of a healthy lifestyle improving the 3 areas of the brain that are affected by aging—memory, reasoning, and motor control. Even people who are well past middle-age who have been inactive for many years can regain lost muscle, lose fat, and restore strength.

Experts agree the so-called “aging process” is not age-specific at all. What makes the body “age” is the combined and cumulative effects of inactivity, poor nutrition, and other harmful health habits. Since you’ve already started practicing good habits, you are headed in the right direction, and you’re even reversing some of the damage that has already been done.

Biomarkers: 10 Determinants of Aging You Can Control

Researchers have identified 10 key physiological factors associated with aging that can be controlled when you become active regardless of your age or physical condition:

1. Lean body mass (muscle)
2. Strength
3. Resting metabolic rate (metabolism)
4. Body fat percentage
5. Aerobic capacity
6. Blood pressure
7. Insulin sensitivity (blood sugar level)
8. Cholesterol
9. Bone density
10. Body temperature regulation

Exercise can improve all of these biomarkers. It’s not a magic pill that will fix them overnight, but exercise is an undisputed solution that provides proven benefits in the short and long term. For example, a 20-minute walk will lower your blood pressure and clear excess sugar, fat, cholesterol, and stress chemicals from your blood stream; those benefits will last for the

Adapted from content provided by J. Michael Gonzalez-Campoy, MD, PhD, FACE



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next 24-36 hours. But just as if you were taking a pill, sometimes you need to adjust the dosage of your exercise routine to retain the benefits.

In 2002, the Institute of Medicine (IM) recommended 60 minutes of activity per day to build cardiac strength and maintain a healthy weight. According to the IM, people should strive for 30 minutes of brisk aerobic activity (such as walking at a 3-5 mph pace) each day. They should try to include 20 minutes of resistance exercise (like weight lifting) 3 days a week and reach the rest of their 60-minute goal by adding movement to their daily routine.

Add movement by:

- Walking to and from errands instead of driving
- Using stairs instead of escalators or elevators
- Marching in place or doing chores while watching TV
- Tensing and relaxing major muscle groups while sitting at your desk

How Exercise Fights Fat Build-Up

A body at rest tends to stay at rest. A body in motion tends to stay in motion.

Once you become more routinely active, you may find that your body craves activity as much as it used to crave sitting or sleeping. Exercise works to burn fat in three ways:

- It burns calories that would have been stored as fat.
- It increases the rate at which you burn calories, not only during the time that you are active, but also for several hours after you're done.
- It can increase the amount of calories you burn all day. If you exercise routinely, you will build muscle, the body's calorie-burning tissue. The more muscle you have, the more calories your body will burn all day, every day, regardless of what else you are doing.

What Hurdles Hold You Back?

Even as you have been making progress, it is always important to identify any obstacles that get in your way. In many cases, obstacles are merely excuses that can be easily overcome. Let's consider some common barriers.



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I Don't Have Time to Exercise

Many people are under the false impression that if they can't exercise for 30 minutes at a time, they shouldn't start. But even short periods of activity done throughout the day—even a few 2-minute walks—can add up to significant health benefits.

Suggestions:

- Walk to another department to talk with a coworker instead of sending an email.
- Get a drink of water from the water fountain farthest away from your desk.
- Go to a different floor in your home when you need to make a phone call.
- Park at the end of the grocery store parking lot.
- Walk down stairs instead of riding the elevator. As your fitness improves, walk up the stairs too.

You also don't have to sacrifice family time or socializing:

- Shared activities build relationships, bring family and friends together, and promote communication.
- Walk at lunch or as soon as you get home at the end of the day.
- Invest in home exercise equipment, which gives you the option to fit activity into your schedule, rain or shine.

I Don't Have a Safe or Convenient Place to Exercise

Now that exercise is a priority for your lifestyle, it is up to you to make it convenient. Be creative in finding new ways to fit more physical activity in to your daily life.

- Consider a membership in a health/fitness club if this is a financial option for you.
- Purchase home exercise equipment.
- Fitness DVDs and/or streaming programs can be economical, fun, and take up little space in your home.

Exercise Is Boring

Experts agree the best exercise is the one you will do! There is no reason to force yourself to do an exercise you find boring.

- If you have settled into a routine, find ways to make it fun.
- Vary your activities to keep them interesting. Try new routes and locations for walking or jogging.
- Choose activities that fit into your lifestyle.
- Watch news, movies, or listen to music while on the treadmill, bike, or elliptical machine.



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I'm Too Tired to Exercise

Just the opposite is true—exercise actually counters the effect of fatigue, and people who exercise regularly report that they have more energy during the day and sleep better at night. When you are tired, get up and get energized with activity.

I Can't See Any Results from My Exercise

Even if you don't see results on the scale or in your measurements, the health benefits of exercise are numerous—reduced cholesterol, lower blood pressure, lower blood sugar, reduced stress, improved endurance and fitness, etc. Focus on better health instead of the numbers.

I Have an Illness/Condition That Limits My Exercise

As wheelchair athletes have proven, nearly everyone can do some type of physical activity. It is just a matter of finding activities that work for you. Discuss the types of physical activity that are safe and effective with your doctor or an exercise physiologist.

Exercise Is Uncomfortable and/or Painful

While some discomfort is normal, physical activity should not be painful. In the beginning, it is important to take it easy and begin slowly. Allow time for warm-up and cool-down periods, remember to stretch, and consult your doctor or an exercise specialist if necessary.

Also consider the environment of your physical activity, especially if you exercise outdoors:

- Dress for comfort and wear proper clothing for the weather.
- Know when the pollen count is high.
- Be informed about physical activity at high altitudes.
- Always stay hydrated.

I Don't Like Sports

You don't need to be a weekend warrior or an athlete to include physical activity in your daily routine. There are several everyday activities that still count as exercise:

- Take a hike
- Walk the dog
- Take the stairs instead of the elevators
- Clean the house
- Use a push mower to mow the lawn
- Do some gardening
- Do some dancing

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In Summary

Now that you have made some progress in your weight management, it is important to stay active and continue on your successful path. Knowing the benefits of exercise, such as fighting the effects of aging and improving your long- and short-term health, is great motivation to move past obstacles that may stand in your way. If something about your exercise is causing you problems, identify what the problem is and find a solution; discuss it with your doctor if needed.

Remember: Great health and weight loss are the ultimate rewards for daily exercise!

