

HHS Fact Sheet

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Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans provide comprehensive science-based guidance on physical activity for Americans. Inspired by President Bush's personal dedication to physical fitness and his desire that every American have access to science-based guidelines, HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt appointed a 13-member Physical Activity Guideline Advisory Committee to review and analyze current scientific literature. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans published by HHS are based on the 683-page report submitted by the advisory committee.

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans are designed so that people can customize them to suit their lifestyle and include activities they enjoy. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans contain examples of activities for different age groups and those with special considerations. A shorter companion guide, *Be Active Your Way*, helps adults develop a customized plan to suit their lifestyle and physical activity goals.

Health benefits of physical activity occur for children and adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, older adults, and those in every studied racial and ethnic group.

Regular physical activity improves health for young and old and reduces the risk of disease. With regular physical activity, children and adolescents improve their cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and bone health, and reduce symptoms of depression. Adults and older adults lower the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, colon and breast cancer and can help prevent falls and reduce depression. Older adults also enjoy better thinking ability with regular physical activity. Regular physical activity also helps people with arthritis or other rheumatic conditions affecting the joints by improving pain management, function, and quality of life.

Some physical activity is better than none; the more physically active you are, the more benefits you reap. For most health outcomes, additional benefits occur as the amount of physical activity increases through higher intensity, greater frequency, and/or longer duration.

Children and adolescents should participate in one hour or more of physical activity per day; and most of the activity should be moderate or vigorous aerobic physical activity. They should participate in vigorous physical activity at least three days a week. They should participate in muscle-strengthening activities, such as push-ups and sit-ups and playing tug-of-war, three days a week. They should incorporate bone-strengthening activities, such as jumping rope, hopping or running, at least three days a week.

Adults gain substantial health benefits from two and one half hours a week of moderate aerobic physical activity or an hour and 15 minutes of vigorous physical activity. Aerobic activity, such as walking briskly, water aerobics, ballroom dancing, jogging, and jumping rope, should be performed in episodes of at least 10 minutes. Increasing aerobic physical activity to five hours a week of moderate activity or two and one half hours a week of vigorous aerobic physical activity, results in more extensive health benefits. Adults should do muscle-strengthening activities, such as weight training, push-ups, sit-ups, carrying heavy loads and heavy gardening, at least two days a week.

Older adults generally should follow the guidelines for adults. If chronic conditions limit their ability to do two and one half hours a week of moderate aerobic activity, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow.

Be safe as well as active. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans include tips for safe physical activity. Some examples are choosing activities appropriate for current fitness level and health goals; increasing physical activity gradually over time to meet guidelines or health goals; and using appropriate gear and sports equipment and looking for safe environments.

For more information about Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, visit www.hhs.gov or www.health.gov/paguidelines.

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