



## Mid-Maryland Internal Medicine

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## Exercise – Get Up and Get Going!

Want to feel better, improve your mood, lose weight, have more energy, improve your sex life and reduce your risk of physical injury and chronic conditions? It could be as simple as incorporating exercise into your life. All living creatures are in motion from the time they are born, and humans are no exception. But over time, our need to move has become less of a necessity and we've become more sedentary. Lack of physical exercise is a significant contributing factor for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity and many other conditions.

The evidence is clear. People who don't exercise at all experience more medical problems than those who do. Even a moderate amount of exercise can improve health enormously. The bottom line – it's never too late to go for it and every little bit helps!

### Key Points

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- Exercise provides significant, measurable mental and physical benefits, especially as we age
- While “the more the better,” is a good general rule, even a little bit of exercise is better than none
- You don't need a gym membership or expensive equipment. Walking, mowing, gardening and swimming are all examples of exercise that can provide health benefits
- There are two types of exercise and both are necessary – *aerobic*, which increases your heart rate, and *strength training*, which maintains or increases muscle mass
- Remember to check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program, especially if you haven't exercised for a long time, have chronic health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes or arthritis, or you have any concerns.

Learn  
More



[Download a document](#) that shows American Heart Association exercise recommendations for heart health.

### Types and Amount of Exercise

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How and how much should you exercise? The good news is that you don't have to spend hours daily doing it to get the positive effects. A moderate amount of exercise is generally sufficient (but of course, the more the better). There are two types of exercise:

*Strength Training* helps to slow the normal process of muscle loss as we age. This type of training is typically done with weights and resistance bands.

*Aerobic activity* or "cardio" gets you breathing harder and your heart beating faster. From pushing a lawn mower, to taking a dance class, to biking to the store – all types of activities count.

Since both strength and aerobic capacity decline as we age, most experts recommend a combination of both types of exercise each week. Experts recommend strength training 1-2 times a week and aerobic exercise 2-5 times a week. Sophisticated equipment is not needed.

Generally, healthy adults should get at least the following per week:

- 2 ½ hours of moderate or 1 ¼ hours of vigorous aerobic activity, and
- 2 sessions of exercise that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

“Moderate” aerobic activity includes things like walking briskly, mowing the lawn, or swimming.

“Vigorous” activity includes running, dancing or rowing. Even ten minute increments is sufficient.

### Recommended Weekly Exercise for Healthy Adults



**2 ½ hours of moderate\* aerobic activity + 2 sessions of strength training for all major muscle groups**

OR



**1 ¼ hours of vigorous\*\* aerobic activity + 2 sessions of strength training for all major muscle groups**

\*examples include walking/mowing/swimming

\*\* examples include running/dancing/rowing

### Frequently Asked Questions

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**Q.** Should I get advice from my physician before I get started?

**A.** Before embarking on any exercise program, it is wise to get a doctor’s evaluation. Your doctor can give you an assessment of your current state of health and what types of exercises are beneficial and which ones should be avoided. For example, asthmatics should exercise with caution in cold dry air, as it may precipitate an asthmatic attack. Individuals with arthritis of the hips and knees need to be careful with high impact aerobics. People with heart disease may precipitate serious cardiac issues with too vigorous a program.

**Q.** I already walk a lot. How much does that help?

**A.** If you walk at least 7,500 steps a day (with roughly half of them at moderate intensity – like a brisk walk) you are probably meeting the national recommendations for moderate physical activity. In this case, “walking” means anything you do that involves one step following the other, like dancing, running or trotting. Fewer than 5,000 steps per day raises the increased likelihood of chronic health conditions.

You don’t need a fancy hi-tech device to count your steps during the day. You can get a basic pedometer for less than \$25. When you first get it, check its accuracy by taking 50 steps and confirming that it registers somewhere between 48 and 52 steps. Note that step counters you wear on your wrist tend to over-count steps. Having an accurate pedometer eliminates the guesswork; you’ll know the truth about your walking activity every day.

**Q.** Do I need a personal trainer?

**A.** Depending on the goal, trainers may be helpful in reaching your desired level of fitness and avoiding injury. One difficulty with trainers (besides expense) is that their levels of expertise are variable and not standardized. Look for individuals who have been in business for a number of years or are associated with gyms such as the YMCA.

If you are over 50, exercise physiologists can be very helpful. These people have at least a bachelor’s degree and frequently a master’s degree in exercise science. They are experienced in working with individuals with medical problems such as heart disease and diabetes. Generally they are associated with hospital systems. Locally, Promotion Fitness (associated with Frederick Memorial) has been in business for over 10 years.

**Q.** Should I buy a DVD exercise program?

**A.** For those of you who want to use the internet or DVDs, use caution. Many of the “boot camp” type of exercise programs are very intense and can result in lasting injuries. Exercise works on the principal that progressive stress on the muscles (note the heart is also a muscle) causes them to adapt/improve/become more efficient. In order for that to happen, there has to be some time for the muscles to rest. That’s when they adapt. If you constantly stress your muscles and joints, they will break down. As a rule of thumb, do not increase your exercise time or intensity by more than 10% per week.

**Q.** What are some good online resources?

**A.** [FitnessBlender.com](http://FitnessBlender.com)

This is a “free site”, in that there are a number of well-constructed and graded (in terms of difficulty) workouts that are available at no cost. You can also get a somewhat personalized program for a nominal cost.

[American College of Sports Medicine Exercise Guidelines](#)

The American College of Sports Medicine has put together some useful guidelines for how to get started and what types of exercise to consider.

### [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

This federal government organization has physical activity guidelines for adults that can give you a sense of how much exercise to get and how to get it.

**Q.** I've tried before, but I give up. How can I increase the chances I'll stick with it?

**A.** Here are some suggestions:

- Use the buddy system - Find a friend or relative you like and trust who also wants to establish a healthier lifestyle. Exercise together and use this as an opportunity to enjoy one another's company and to strengthen the relationship.
- Make your plan fit your life – make exercising as easy as possible. Don't set up expectations to exercise only at a gym if getting there is difficult.
- Make yourself happy – if you don't like lifting weights, don't commit to going to a fitness center that focuses on weightlifting. Exercise shouldn't be a chore. Dancing can provide just as much of a workout as running. Stick to activities that you enjoy.

### Get Started – You can Do It!

You don't need pricey nutritional supplements, an expensive gym membership or a personal trainer (although they can be helpful depending on your physical condition and goals). Exercising can extend your life, decrease disabilities, and is free, easy, and a great excuse to get outside and smell the roses. There are very few other things that can make that claim.

It is important to consult with your doctor before embarking on an exercise regimen, especially if you have any chronic medical conditions. Decide on what fitness goals you want to pursue. If general fitness is what you want, you can do that with as little as 20 minutes, 3-5 times per week. Finally and perhaps most importantly, regular exercise gives you a lasting sense of accomplishment and well-being. It is something you can and should be doing throughout your life.