



Adults: Fitting Exercise into Daily Life

Physical activity is important throughout the life span, especially during adulthood. As we age, we are less likely to engage in physical activity. By the time we are 25, most of us have chosen sedentary jobs, have family or career responsibilities and have put our health and well being at the bottom of our list of priorities. The continual advances in modern technology allow us to perform everyday tasks with little or no effort. Our sedentary lifestyles put us at risk for developing heart disease, osteoporosis, diabetes and depression.

The good news is that it is never too late to start exercising.

You don't have to train for a marathon to reap the benefits of daily physical activity. Even moderately intense exercise can result in health benefits. In fact, expending only 100 to 150 calories per day, by walking for 10 to 15 minutes, may decrease the risk of cardiovascular disease by 30 percent to 40 percent, as well as decrease psychological and metabolic disorders, such as depression and obesity.

Consequences of a sedentary lifestyle

A sedentary lifestyle has been linked to premature death, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity and above normal cholesterol. In addition, sedentary living decreases bone density, which puts you at an increased risk of injury or developing osteoporosis.

Inactivity may also lead to loss in muscle mass, resulting in generalized physical weakness. Physical weakness caused by the deconditioning associated with a sedentary lifestyle can result in a loss of independence, as people become unable to perform activities required for daily living. Many older adults have difficulty removing the top of medicine bottle or getting up from a chair. Finally, inactivity will lead to decreased flexibility, making it difficult to perform such tasks as bending over to tie your shoes.

Fortunately, participating in moderately intense, daily activity can counteract these consequences, no matter how long you've been inactive. Regular physical activity can help improve strength and stamina. Examples of moderately intense activity include, cycling five miles in 30 minutes, walking two miles in 30 minutes, pushing a stroller a mile and a half for 30 minutes or participating in a water aerobics class for 30 minutes.

In addition, all adults can benefit from a structured resistance training program. Resistance training, also known as strength training or weight training, involves moving the muscles against a force. The force you resist may be in the form of free weights, resistance bands, resistance training machines or your own body weight. The benefits of resistance training include increased strength and an increase in lean body mass. In addition, resistance training results in an increase in basal metabolic rate, which results in more calories burned each day! Resistance training also helps maintain a healthy body composition and can improve self-confidence and self-esteem.

How to get started

The key to beginning a physical activity routine in adulthood is to start slowly. Don't expect to be as fast as you were when you were younger. Begin by doing five to ten minutes of your chosen activity and gradually increase the duration over a period of time.

Choose activities you enjoy, specifically those of moderate intensity (see below). This will help you stay motivated to continue the activity and ensure that you are working at an appropriate starting intensity. As you become more proficient in your activities, you can gradually increase how long and how hard you exercise. However, you should only increase one variable at a time: Once you are comfortable, you can extend your 15-minute walk to 25 minutes, maintaining the same intensity. Or, increase your speed to a light jog, but stay with your 15-minute duration.

Determining exercise intensity

Exercise intensity involves how hard you're exercising. Exercise scientists describe three main exercise intensities: low, moderate and high. Although people can monitor their exercise intensity many different ways, heart rate is probably the most convenient method. Low intensity exercise is equivalent to 20 percent to 50 percent of your maximal heart rate (MHR), moderate intensity is 50 percent to 70 percent of your maximal heart rate and high intensity is 70 percent and above.

To determine an appropriate exercise heart rate for you, first calculate your age-predicted maximal heart rate using the following equation: maximal heart rate (MHR) = 220 – your age in years. Once you have determined your MHR you can set a heart rate range. A heart rate range sets parameters for your workout and allows you to monitor its intensity. For example, a 50-year-old person who wants to exercise at moderate intensity should exercise between a heart rate range of 85 beats-per-minute to 119 beats-per-minute ($220 - 50 = 170$; $170 \times .50 = 85$; $170 \times .70 = 119$).

Tips for adding activity into your day

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park your car further from your destination.
- Walk to the store rather than drive.
- Incorporate exercise into playtime with children or grandchildren.
- Organize a walking club at work.
- Ride your bike to the post office.

It's never too late to make physical activity part of your life. Focus on starting slowly. As you build confidence and skill in your activities, increase the duration or intensity of your workouts. Finally, enjoy your activities! As you work to improve and maintain your wellbeing, you'll discover new interests, make new friends and set a positive example for those around you.

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