Exercise: Why Fitness Matters

Being fit improves your health.

A lifetime of fitness offers many benefits such as:

- Reducing your risk of health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and some types of cancer
- Managing your weight
- Helping you sleep better
- Preventing or easing stress, depression, and back problems
- Boosting your energy

You need to continue exercising to keep these benefits. Your main goal is to make fitness a lifetime commitment. Here are some tips:

- Build a fitness plan that you can stick with.
- Choose activities you like.
- Go slowly, especially when just starting out.
- Work up to being active 30 minutes on most days.

Moderate and vigorous physical activity

Aim for a total of 150 or more minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity. Or try for 75 minutes or more of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity a week. Or do an equal mix of both.

- Moderate-intensity activity. This means your heart is beating faster and you can talk while you exercise. Examples are dancing, gardening, brisk walking.
- Vigorous-intensity activity. This means your heart is beating faster and it's hard to talk in full sentences while you exercise. Examples may include running, swimming laps, hiking uphill.

Try to spread out your activity during the week. Also, 2 days a week, do muscle strengthening activities at a moderate or greater intensity.

Some benefits from fitness

People who are physically fit:

- Are more alert and productive
- Have more energy, both physically and mentally
- Handle stress better
- Sleep better
- Have better overall health
- Are less likely to get injured

Check your health first

It's a good idea to talk with your healthcare provider before starting a new exercise program. This is especially important if you answer yes to any of the questions below:

- Has a provider ever said you have heart trouble?
- Do you ever have chest pains?
- Do you often feel faint or have dizzy spells?
- Has a provider ever said your blood pressure is too high?
- Has a provider ever said that you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by exercise?
- Do you take any prescription medicines for problems such as diabetes or asthma?

Will I lose weight?

Many of us would like to lose or keep off a few pounds (kilograms). Being more active each day and building muscle can help. Here’s how:

- Being active burns calories. You burn nearly twice as many calories just walking slowly as you do sitting.
- Muscle burns more calories than fat. So the more muscle you build up from activity, the more calories you burn.
- If you add more muscle, you’ll use more calories even when you’re not being active.
- Being active helps you keep more muscle as you age. More muscle means it will be easier to control your weight.

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