Healthy Living SM

Be Physically Active

Did you know that less than half of U.S. adults get enough physical activity? No matter what your age or body type, you can benefit from even small amounts of activity. You should avoid inactivity.

What are the benefits of being physically active?

- You will have greater energy and stamina.
- You may reduce your chances for developing diseases, such as depression, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, stroke, and some kinds of cancer.

How much physical activity do I need?

- Aim for at least 2½ hours each week of moderate-intensity physical activity. This means that when you move, you can talk but you can't sing. Try it! Choose activities you enjoy, such as walking fast, dancing, and raking leaves.
- To begin, get your body moving. Start at a level that is comfortable. When this level seems easy, add a little more activity each time. Every 10-minute session counts.
- You can also choose to aim for 1¼ hours a week of vigorous-intensity physical activity. This means when you move, you can't say more than a few words without pausing for a breath. Try activities like jogging, jumping rope, swimming laps, or riding a bike uphill.
- If you choose, you can combine both moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity.
- Even if you are out of shape or if you haven't been active for a long time, you can begin to be active safely.
- If you have a chronic condition (such as diabetes, heart disease, or arthritis) or a health condition that concerns you, talk with your health care team before you begin.

A Better Way to **LIVE**

Talk with your health care team about your goals.

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- Aerobic activity increases your endurance. This means you can stay active for longer periods of time. Aerobic activity is when you move your large muscles for a period of time. You can also feel your heart beating faster and harder than usual. Try it for periods of at least 10 minutes spread out during the week.

What other physical activities are good for me?

- Do strengthening activities at least twice each week. Try to use all the major muscle groups in your body. This means using the muscles in your legs, hips, back, chest, abdomen, shoulders, and arms. To strengthen these muscles, include resistance training or weight lifting. You can create resistance with elastic bands, handheld weights, or your own body weight. The muscles that do the work will strengthen over time.
- Stretching can help you increase flexibility, improve circulation and range of motion in your joints, and relieve stress. It is best to stretch when you are physically active. If you are not active on a regular basis, stretching at least three times each week is a good starting point.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- VHA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention: www.prevention.va.gov
- Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*: www.health.gov/paguidelines
- The President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition*: http://www.fitness.gov
- Healthfinder — Get Active*: http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicId=22

* Indicates that the link leads to a non-VA website. The VA is not responsible for content on the site.

If you have questions about how to make healthy living changes, please talk with your health care team.

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