

Fitness Information For Teens, Fourth Edition



Physical Activity And Its Importance

What Is Physical Activity?

Physical activity simply means movement of the body that uses energy. Walking, gardening, briskly pushing a baby stroller, climbing the stairs, playing soccer, or dancing the night away are all good examples of being active. For health benefits, physical activity should be moderate or vigorous intensity.

Moderate physical activities include:

- Walking briskly (about 3½ miles per hour)
- Bicycling (less than 10 miles per hour)
- General gardening (raking, trimming shrubs)
- Dancing
- Golf (walking and carrying clubs)
- Water aerobics
- Canoeing
- Tennis (doubles)

About This Chapter: Text beginning with the heading “What Is Physical Activity?” is excerpted from “Physical Activity,” ChooseMyPlate.gov, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), June 10, 2015; Text under the heading “What Being Active Does For Your Body” is excerpted from “Why Physical Activity Is Important,” girlshealth.gov, Office on Women’s Health (OWH), March 27, 2015.

Vigorous physical activities include:

- Running/jogging (5 miles per hour)
- Walking very fast (4½ miles per hour)
- Bicycling (more than 10 miles per hour)
- Heavy yard work, such as chopping wood
- Swimming (freestyle laps)
- Aerobics
- Basketball (competitive)
- Tennis (singles)

You can choose moderate or vigorous intensity activities, or a mix of both each week. Activities can be considered vigorous, moderate, or light in intensity. This depends on the extent to which they make you breathe harder and your heart beat faster.

Only moderate and vigorous intensity activities count toward meeting your physical activity needs. With vigorous activities, you get similar health benefits in half the time it takes you with moderate ones. You can replace some or all of your moderate activity with vigorous activity. Although you are moving, light intensity activities do not increase your heart rate, so you should not count these towards meeting the physical activity recommendations. These activities include walking at a casual pace, such as while grocery shopping, and doing light household chores.

Why Is Physical Activity Important?

Regular physical activity can produce long-term health benefits. People of all ages, shapes, sizes, and abilities can benefit from being physically active. The more physical activity you do, the greater the health benefits.

Being physically active can help you:

- Increase your chances of living longer
- Feel better about yourself
- Decrease your chances of becoming depressed
- Sleep well at night
- Move around more easily

- Have stronger muscles and bones
- Stay at or get to a healthy weight
- Be with friends or meet new people
- Enjoy yourself and have fun

When you are not physically active, you are more likely to:

- Get heart disease
- Get type 2 diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have high blood cholesterol
- Have a stroke

Physical activity and nutrition work together for better health. Being active increases the amount of calories burned. As people age their metabolism slows, so maintaining energy balance requires moving more and eating less.

Some types of physical activity are especially beneficial:

- **Aerobic activities** make you breathe harder and make your heart beat faster. Aerobic activities can be moderate or vigorous in their intensity. Vigorous activities take more effort than moderate ones. For moderate activities, you can talk while you do them, but you can't sing. For vigorous activities, you can only say a few words without stopping to catch your breath.
- **Muscle strengthening activities** make your muscles stronger. These include activities like push-ups and lifting weights. It is important to work all the different parts of the body your legs, hips, back, chest, stomach, shoulders, and arms.
- **Bone strengthening activities** make your bones stronger. Bone strengthening activities, like jumping, are especially important for children and adolescents. These activities produce a force on the bones that promotes bone growth and strength.
- **Balance and stretching activities** enhance physical stability and flexibility, which reduces risk of injuries. Examples are gentle stretching, dancing, yoga, martial arts, and tai chi.

How Much Physical Activity Is Needed?

Physical activity is important for everyone, but how much you need depends on your age.

Children And Adolescents (6–17 Years)

Children and adolescents should do 60 minutes or more of physical activity each day. Most of the 60 minutes should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, and should include vigorous intensity physical activity at least 3 days a week. As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include muscle strengthening activities, like climbing, at least 3 days a week and bone strengthening activities, like jumping, at least 3 days a week. Children and adolescents are often active in short bursts of time rather than for sustained periods of time, and these short bursts can add up to meet physical activity needs. Physical activities for children and adolescents should be developmentally appropriate, fun, and offer variety.

Physical activity is generally safe for everyone. The health benefits you gain from being active are far greater than the chances of getting hurt. Here are some things you can do to stay safe while you are active:

- If you haven't been active in a while, start slowly and build up.
- Learn about the types and amounts of activity that are right for you.
- Choose activities that are appropriate for your fitness level.
- Build up the time you spend before switching to activities that take more effort.
- Use the right safety gear and sports equipment.
- Choose a safe place to do your activity.
- See a healthcare provider if you have a health problem.

How Many Calories Does Physical Activity Burn?

A 154-pound man who is 5' 10" will use up (burn) about the number of calories listed doing each activity below. Those who weigh more will use more calories; those who weigh less will use fewer calories. The calorie values listed include both calories used by the activity and the calories used for normal body functioning during the activity time.

Table 2.1. Physical Activity Calorie Chart

| Approximate Calories Used (Burned) By A 154-Pound Man | | |
|--|------------------|----------------------|
| MODERATE physical activities: | In 1 hour | In 30 minutes |
| Hiking | 370 | 185 |
| Light gardening/yard work | 330 | 165 |
| Dancing | 330 | 165 |

Table 2.1. Continued

| Approximate Calories Used (Burned) By A 154-Pound Man | | |
|--|------------------|----------------------|
| MODERATE physical activities: | In 1 hour | In 30 minutes |
| Golf (walking and carrying clubs) | 330 | 165 |
| Bicycling (less than 10 mph) | 290 | 145 |
| Walking (3.5 mph) | 280 | 140 |
| Weight training (general light workout) | 220 | 110 |
| Stretching | 180 | 90 |
| VIGOROUS physical activities: | In 1 hour | In 30 minutes |
| Running/jogging (5 mph) | 590 | 295 |
| Bicycling (more than 10 mph) | 590 | 295 |
| Swimming (slow freestyle laps) | 510 | 255 |
| Aerobics | 480 | 240 |
| Walking (4.5 mph) | 460 | 230 |
| Heavy yard work (chopping wood) | 440 | 220 |
| Weight lifting (vigorous effort) | 440 | 220 |
| Basketball (vigorous) | 440 | 220 |

Tips For Increasing Physical Activity

Make Physical Activity A Regular Part Of The Day

Choose activities that you enjoy and can do regularly. Fitting activity into a daily routine can be easy—such as taking a brisk 10 minute walk to and from the parking lot, bus stop, or subway station. Or, join an exercise class. Keep it interesting by trying something different on alternate days. Every little bit adds up and doing something is better than doing nothing.

Make sure to do at least 10 minutes of activity at a time, shorter bursts of activity will not have the same health benefits. For example, walking the dog for 10 minutes before and after work or adding a 10 minute walk at lunchtime can add to your weekly goal. Mix it up. Swim, take a yoga class, garden, or lift weights. To be ready anytime, keep some comfortable clothes and a pair of walking or running shoes in the car and at the office.

More Ways To Increase Physical Activity

At home:

- Join a walking group in the neighborhood or at the local shopping mall. Recruit a partner for support and encouragement.

- Push the baby in a stroller.
- Get the whole family involved—enjoy an afternoon bike ride with your kids.
- Walk up and down the soccer or softball field sidelines while watching the kids play.
- Walk the dog—don't just watch the dog walk.
- Clean the house or wash the car.
- Walk, skate, or cycle more, and drive less.
- Do stretches, exercises, or pedal a stationary bike while watching television.
- Mow the lawn with a push mower.
- Plant and care for a vegetable or flower garden.
- Play with the kids—tumble in the leaves, build a snowman, splash in a puddle, or dance to favorite music.
- Exercise to a workout video.

At work:

- Get off the bus or subway one stop early and walk or skate the rest of the way.
- Replace a coffee break with a brisk 10-minute walk. Ask a friend to go with you.
- Take part in an exercise program at work or a nearby gym.
- Join the office softball team or walking group.

At play:

- Walk, jog, skate, or cycle.
- Swim or do water aerobics.
- Take a class in martial arts, dance, or yoga.
- Golf (pull cart or carry clubs).
- Canoe, row, or kayak.
- Play racquetball, tennis, or squash.
- Ski cross-country or downhill.
- Play basketball, softball, or soccer.
- Hand cycle or play wheelchair sports.

- Take a nature walk.
- Most important—have fun while being active!

What Being Active Does For Your Body

Being physically active is great for your muscles, heart, and lungs. Some other possible benefits of activity include:

- **Building strong bones.** Your body creates the most bone when you are a kid and a teen. You can learn more about how to build great bones.
- **Promoting a healthy weight.** Obesity is a serious problem among kids in the United States. It can lead to problems with your sleep, knees, heart, emotions, and more, but exercise can help.
- **Helping avoid diabetes.** A lot more young people are getting diabetes than ever before. Regular physical activity can help prevent one type of diabetes.
- **Building healthy habits.** If you get used to being active now, you will more likely keep it up when you're older. You'll thank yourself later!
- **Fighting cancer.** Research shows that exercise may help protect against certain kinds of cancer, including breast cancer.
- **Helping prevent high blood pressure.** The number of kids with high blood pressure is growing. High blood pressure makes your heart and arteries work extra hard to pump blood. It also puts you at risk for things like kidney and eye disease.

Are you worried that exercise will bulk you up? Exercising won't give you big, bulging muscles. It takes a very intense weightlifting program to get a bodybuilder look. And exercise and other forms of physical activity can help if you need to lose weight or want to stay a healthy weight.