

A Report of Surgeon General

THE BENEFITS OF REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:

Regular physical activity that is performed on most days of the week reduces the risk of developing or dying from some of the leading causes of illness and death in the United States. Regular physical activity improves health in the following ways:

- Reduces the risk of dying prematurely.
- Reduces the risk of dying from heart disease.
- Reduces the risk of developing diabetes.
- Reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure.
- Helps reduce blood pressure in people who already have high blood pressure.
- Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer.
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety.
- Helps control weight.
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps older adults become stronger and better able to move about without falling.
- Promotes psychological well-being.

STATUS OF THE NATION - A NEED FOR CHANGE:

Adults

- More than 60 percent of adults do not achieve the recommended amount of regular physical activity. In fact, 25 percent of all adults are not active at all.
- Inactivity increases with age and is more common among women than men and among those with lower income and less education than among those with higher income or education

Adolescents and Young Adults

- Nearly half of young people aged 12-21 are not vigorously active on a regular basis.
- Physical activity declines dramatically with age during adolescence.
- Female adolescents are much less physically active than male adolescents.

High School Students

- In high school, enrollment in daily physical education classes dropped from 42 percent in 1991 to 25 percent in 1995.
- Only 19 percent of all high school students are physically active for 20 minutes or more in physical education classes every day during the school week.

WHAT IS A MODERATE AMOUNT OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

As the examples listed in the box show, a moderate amount of physical activity* can be achieved in a variety of ways. People can select activities that they enjoy and that fit into their daily lives. Because amount of activity is a function of duration, intensity, and frequency, the same amount of activity can be obtained in longer sessions of moderately intense activities (such as brisk walking) as in shorter sessions of more strenuous activities (such as running):

EXAMPLES OF MODERATE AMOUNTS OF ACTIVITY:

Less Vigorous, More Time
Washing and waxing a car for 45-60 minutes
Washing windows or floors for 45-60 minutes
Playing volleyball for 45 minutes
Playing touch football for 30-45 minutes
Gardening for 30-45 minutes
Wheeling self in wheelchair for 30-40 minutes
Walking 1 3/4 miles in 35 minutes (20 min/mile)
Basketball (shooting baskets) for 30 minutes
Bicycling 5 miles in 30 minutes
Dancing fast (social) for 30 minutes
Pushing a stroller 1 1/2 miles in 30 minutes
Raking leaves for 30 minutes
Walking 2 miles in 30 minutes (15 min/mile)
Water aerobics for 30 minutes
Swimming laps for 20 minutes
Wheelchair basketball for 20 minutes
Basketball (playing a game) for 15-20 minutes
Bicycling 4 miles in 15 minutes
Jumping rope for 15 minutes
Running 1 1/2 miles in 15 minutes (10 min/mile)
Shoveling snow for 15 minutes
Stairwalking for 15 minutes
More Vigorous, Less Time

* A moderate amount of physical activity is roughly equivalent to physical activity that uses approximately 150 Calories (kcal) of energy per day, or 1,000 Calories per week.

+ Some activities can be performed at various intensities; the suggested durations correspond to expected intensity of effort.