



Practical Reviews™

CHRONIC DISEASES

# Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans: 2nd Edition

US Department of Health and Human Services

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Increasing physical activity is one of the most important lifestyle changes that people of all ages can make to improve their health. The second edition of the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, newly updated from the original 2008 edition, reviews the evidence, which suggests that physical activity can improve quality of life, improve sleep quality, and reduce the risk of many chronic diseases.<sup>1</sup> Some changes in the second edition include:

- Additional health benefits related to brain health, additional cancer sites, and fall-related injuries
- Immediate and longer-term benefits for how people feel, function, and sleep
- Further benefits among older adults and people with additional chronic conditions
- Risks of sedentary behavior and the relationship to physical activity
- Guidance for preschool children (ages 3 through 5 years)
- Elimination of the requirement for physical activity of adults to occur in bouts of at least 10 minutes
- Tested strategies that can be used to get the population more active

The guidelines make recommendations for children, adolescents, and adults; this review focuses on recommendations for adults.

The bottom-line message for improving health is, “sit less, move more.” Some physical activity is better than none. Evidence shows that adults who sit less and do any amount of moderate-to vigorous physical activity gain some health benefits.

The guidelines give examples of moderate-intensity and vigorous-intensity activities.

#### **Moderate-Intensity Activities**

- Walking briskly (2.5 miles/hour or faster)
- Recreational swimming
- Bicycling slower than 10 miles/hour on level terrain
- Tennis (doubles)
- Active forms of yoga (eg, Vinyasa or power yoga)
- Ballroom or line dancing
- General yard work and home repair work
- Exercise classes like water aerobics

**Vigorous-intensity Activities**

- Jogging or running
- Swimming laps
- Tennis (singles)
- Vigorous dancing
- Bicycling faster than 10 miles/hour
- Jumping rope
- Heavy yard work (eg, digging or shoveling, with heart rate increases)
- Hiking uphill or with a heavy backpack
- High-intensity interval training (HIIT)
- Exercise classes (eg, vigorous step aerobics or kickboxing)

For substantial health benefits, adults should spend at least 150 to 300 minutes/week performing moderate-intensity exercise. Alternatively, 75 to 150 minutes/week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity will provide similar benefits. An equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity could also achieve the same purpose. Preferably, aerobic activity should be spread throughout the week.

Exercising more than the equivalent of 300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity/week will provide additional benefit.

Muscle-strengthening activities of moderate or greater intensity on 2 or more days/week should be added to aerobic exercise. Muscle-strengthening activities should involve all major muscle groups.

For older adults, exercise recommendations are similar for adults, but balance training should be added. Older adults should do multicomponent physical activity that includes balance training as well as aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities. The level of effort for physical activity should be based on level of fitness. Older adults with chronic conditions should understand whether and how their conditions affect their ability to do regular physical activity safely. For older adults who cannot do 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity because of chronic conditions, recommend physical activity as allowed by abilities and conditions.

During pregnancy and the postpartum period, women should do at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity. Preferably, aerobic activity should be spread throughout the week. Women who habitually engage in vigorous-intensity aerobic activity or who were physically active before pregnancy can continue these activities during pregnancy and the postpartum period.



Guidelines for adults for chronic health conditions or disabilities are the same as adults without health conditions or disabilities. When patients are not able to meet the guidelines, recommend regular physical activity according to abilities and avoidance of inactivity. Referral to a physical activity specialist about the appropriate types and amounts of activity may be appropriate for some patients.

Physical activity must be safe. Educate patients to understand the risks, yet be confident that physical activity can be safe for almost everyone. Choose types of physical activity that are appropriate for current fitness level and health goals. For many patients, the best approach may be to increase physical activity gradually over time to meet key guidelines or health goals. “Start low and go slow” when making recommendations to inactive patients. Start with lower intensity activities and gradually increase the frequency and duration. Warn patients to protect themselves by using appropriate gear and sports equipment, choosing safe environments, following rules and policies, and making sensible choices about when, where, and how to be active.

Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans is written in lay language. Tell patients that both a summary document and the full document can be downloaded for free from the Internet.

### **About the Authors**

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### **Reference**

- 1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018.