



# Physical Activity—One of Life's Necessities

Fact Sheet FS1120



## Cooperative Extension

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH SCIENCES

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*"If bread is the first necessity of life, recreation is a close second."* This is a famous quote by Edward Bellamy, a nineteenth century American author. Eating a well balanced diet and staying physically active provides the energy and strength needed to go about our daily activities.

The 2008 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) questionnaire, created by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), found that about 75% of adults nationwide said that they had participated in some form of physical activity in the previous month. Although this statistic is encouraging, it does show that there is room for improvement. The CDC recommends that every adult should aim to participate in a weekly total of at least two hours and thirty minutes (150 minutes) of moderate physical activity or a weekly total of one hour and fifteen minutes (75 minutes) of vigorous physical activity. In either case, it is recommended that some form of strength training be included at least two times a week.

### Types of Physical Activities

**Moderate physical activities** can be described as those that increase both the heart rate and breathing. If a person has not participated in any physical activities in a long time, it is important that they start off slowly with moderate activities, checking with their physician first. Walking "briskly" or doing yard work are great examples of moderate physical activities.

**Intense or vigorous activities** are those that raise a person's heart rate rather quickly and tend to burn more calories than moderate activities. Aerobic dance and running are examples of vigorous activities. It is important that a person gradually work their way up to participating in vigorous activities. Participating in an activity such as a five mile run when a person has not been physically active could turn into a painful, dangerous experience that could result in injury.

**Muscle-strength training activities** are those that help build muscles and increase flexibility such as weight lifting, yoga

and working with resistant bands. When doing these types of activities it is important to work all major muscle groups (arms, legs, back, abdomen, hips, chest, and shoulders). A person needs to allow their body a one day recovery period between each strength training session. This rest will allow muscles to recover and rebuild.

### Physical Activity Choices

Many physical activities can be done at home or in the neighborhood for free. Walking around the block with a family member or friend not only provides the benefit of being physically active, but can also contribute to building a close relationship with those walking partners. Neighborhood kickball or volleyball games help make bones and muscles grow stronger while also allowing communities to come together. These types of activities can be free and fun at the same time.

Some activities may require going to a local park or recreation center. Special equipment or facilities may be needed for activities such as tennis, ice skating or rock climbing. In some cases a small fee may also be required. Various sports leagues such as soccer, tennis and basketball occur throughout the year. Many communities offer a variety of classes and activities year round.

Information on local parks and recreation facilities can be found in local newspapers or on the internet. One source of this type of information is the "Get Moving-Get Healthy New Jersey" website, [www.getmovinggethealthynj.rutgers.edu](http://www.getmovinggethealthynj.rutgers.edu). This website provides a variety of activities that people can participate in, including a list of hiking and biking trails that are in the area. One of the programs that a person can participate in on this

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website is called "Walk New Jersey Point-to-Point". The goal of this program is to get people of all ages moving and to virtually walk the length of New Jersey. This activity can be done right at home. Participants are encouraged to record their daily steps/miles which can be accumulated through activities such as walking, biking, roller-blading or gardening. Each activity has a value associated with it, and over an eight week period of time, participants are working to complete a total of 214 miles. This is the distance between High Point and Cape May Point, NJ.

## Benefits of Physical Activity

The reasons and motivations that encourage people to participate in physical activity vary. Regardless of their motives, the benefits of participating in a variety of activities are universal.

- Moderate and vigorous physical activities help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.
- Studies have shown that mental health is often improved with physical activity.
- Strength training activities help people gain and maintain muscle mass, build strong bones and can also help increase a person's flexibility and balance as well as maintain their weight.
- A person who has a high amount of muscle mass will have a higher metabolic rate and thus be able to burn fat quicker.

## Making Physical Activity a Priority

Many people do not feel as though they are able to participate in physical activities because they do not have the time or resources to do so. Some may feel that their lives are too busy or that they are unable to fit in thirty minutes of exercise a day.

If so, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) suggests doing only ten minutes of physical activity at a time. For example, taking 10 minutes out of a 30 minute lunch break to go for a brisk walk with a coworker is an acceptable way to work towards a total of 30 minutes of physical activity each day.

There is no need to spend a lot of money on equipment, nor is there any reason to make major changes to ones daily routine to start to make physical activity a part of it. In fact, many of the things that people do in their daily lives may just need some fine tuning to help them work towards becoming more physically active. For example:

- Use a rake instead of a leaf blower to get the leaves cleaned up for the season;
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator to the office;
- Wash your car instead of taking it to the car wash.

Starting out slow may be necessary to achieve the recommended amount of physical activity each day. Add new activities gradually and with the advice of a health care professional if you have not recently been active.

Everyone can benefit from being physically active. If a person has a physical disability that limits them from doing some of the activities that have been mentioned here, they should talk with their doctor. Together they can develop a physical activity plan that would prove to be beneficial.

According to Mr. Bellamy, eating healthy and being physically active are the two necessities of life. We cannot reap the full benefits of one without doing the other. So fill those needs by eating well and staying active!

### For More Information

[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)  
[www.getmovinggethealthynj.rutgers.edu](http://www.getmovinggethealthynj.rutgers.edu)

[www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Strength Training Activities Aim to do these at least two times a week
Weightlifting
Working with resistant bands
Yoga
Doing exercises that use your body weight for resistance:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ push-ups</li> <li>▪ calf raises</li> <li>▪ sit-up</li> <li>▪ lunges</li> </ul>

Moderate-Intensity Activities Aim for 150 minutes a week	Vigorous-Intensity Activities Aim for 75 minutes a week
General gardening (raking, trimming shrubs)	Aerobic dance
Biking on level ground	Biking faster than 10 mph
Dancing	Heavy gardening (digging, shoveling)
Playing catch	Sports with lots of running (soccer, basketball)
Playing frisbee	Hiking uphill
Shooting baskets (basketball)	Jump roping
Volleyball	Martial arts (such as karate)
Snowshoeing	Running
Downhill skiing	Ice hockey
Walking briskly	Cross-country skiing
Using your manual wheelchair	Swimming laps

Charts adapted from [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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