

2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans Fact Sheet for Health Professionals on Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Adults

How much physical activity do older adults need for health benefits?

Regular physical activity is one of the most important things older adults can do for their health. Physical activity can prevent many of the health problems that may come with age.

If adults aged 65 years of age or older are generally fit, they can follow the guidelines listed below. According to the *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, older adults need to do two types of physical activity each week to improve health – aerobic **and** muscle-strengthening.

If older adults have a chronic disease or other health condition that might limit activity and prevent them from meeting the guidelines, they should talk with their health-care provider about setting physical activity goals. They should avoid an inactive lifestyle. Inactive older adults should increase their amount of physical activity gradually. Older adults should also do exercises that maintain or improve balance if they are at risk of falling.

Aerobic Activities

For **substantial health benefits**, adults need to do at least

- **2 hours and 30 minutes** (150 minutes) each week of relatively **moderate-intensity*** aerobic activity,
- OR
- **1 hour and 15 minutes** (75 minutes) each week of relatively **vigorous-intensity*** aerobic activity,
- OR
- A **mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity** aerobic activity.

Aerobic activity should be performed for **at least 10 minutes at a time**, preferably, **spread throughout the week**.

***Intensity** is the level of effort required to do an activity.

A person doing **moderate-intensity** aerobic activity can talk, but not sing, during the activity.

A person doing **vigorous-intensity** activity cannot say more than a few words without pausing for a breath.

Muscle Strengthening Activities

Muscle strengthening should be done **2 or more days a week**.

- All major muscle groups should be worked. These are the legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms.
- Exercises for each muscle group should be repeated 8 to 12 times per set. As exercises become easier, increase the weight or do another set.



How much physical activity do older adults need for additional health benefits?

Aerobic Activities

For **greater health benefits**, older adults should work up to

- **5 hours** (300 minutes) each week of relatively **moderate-intensity** aerobic activity,
- OR
- **2 hours and 30 minutes** (150 minutes) a week of relatively **vigorous-intensity** aerobic activity,
- OR
- **A mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity** aerobic activity.

Health Benefits from Regular Physical Activity

Participating in regular physical activity provides many health benefits, as summarized below. Reducing risk of some of these conditions may require long-term participation, but the result is worth it. Other benefits, such as increased heart and lung—or cardiorespiratory—fitness, may require only a few weeks or months of participation.

Strong Evidence for Health Benefits

- **Lower risk of:**
 - Early death
 - Coronary heart disease
 - Stroke
 - High blood pressure
 - High cholesterol or triglycerides
 - Type 2 diabetes
 - Metabolic syndrome
 - Colon cancer
 - Breast cancer
- **Prevention of weight gain**
- **Weight loss, particularly when combined with reduced calorie intake**
- **Improved cardiorespiratory fitness and muscular strength**
- **Prevention of falls**
- **Reduced depression**
- **Better brain function**



Aerobic Activities by Level of Intensity

Relative intensity is related to a person's level of heart and lung—or cardiorespiratory—fitness and means the level of effort needed at his or her fitness level. As a rule of thumb, on a scale of 0 to 10, where sitting is 0 and the highest level of effort possible is 10, moderate-intensity activity is a 5 or 6. Vigorous-intensity activity is a 7 or 8.

Older adults can meet the guidelines by doing moderate-intensity activities, vigorous-intensity activities, or a combination of both. For example, the relative intensity of a walk depends on cardiorespiratory fitness and can be light intensity for an elite athlete, moderate intensity for recreational walkers, high intensity for inactive middle-aged or older adults, or impossible for near-frail older adults.

People doing moderate-intensity activity will notice that their hearts are beating faster than normal and they are breathing harder than normal. People doing vigorous-intensity activity will feel these as being much faster and harder than normal.

Adults with chronic conditions should engage in regular physical activity because it can help improve their quality of life and reduce the risk of developing new conditions. They should decide on the type and amount based on their abilities and on the severity of the chronic condition. In many cases, physical activity can improve symptoms and is part of the recommended treatment.

Many factors may influence older adults' decisions on ways to be active, such as their current health and safety. Healthy older adults generally do not need to consult a health-care provider before becoming active.

Below are some examples of aerobic physical activities for older adults.

Aerobic Activities

- Walking
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Water aerobics
- Jogging
- Aerobic exercise classes
- Bicycle riding (stationary or on a path)
- Some gardening activities, such as raking and pushing a lawn mower
- Tennis
- Golf (without a cart)



Muscle-Strengthening Activities

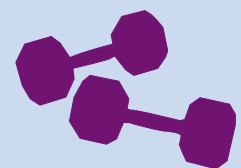
Older adults also should do activities that **strengthen their muscles at least 2 days a week**, at a moderate to high level of intensity. Whether at home or in the gym, the activities they choose should work all the major muscle groups of the body (legs, hips, back, chest, abdomen, shoulders, and arms).

No specific time is recommended for muscle-strengthening, but exercises should be performed to the point at which it would be difficult to do another repetition.

Older adults can do activities that strengthen muscles on the same or different days that they do aerobic activity, whichever works best. Muscle-strengthening activities do not count toward the aerobic activity total. Below are some examples of muscle-strengthening physical activities for older adults.

Types of Muscle-Strengthening Activity

- Exercises using exercise bands, weight machines, hand-held weights
- Callisthenic exercises (body weight provides resistance to movement)
- Digging, lifting, and carrying as part of gardening
- Some yoga exercises and some tai chi exercises



Improving Balance

Strong evidence shows that regular physical activity is safe and reduces the risk of falls in older adults. Older adults at risk of falling should do exercises that maintain or improve their balance. For best results, they should do these exercises

- **at least 3 days a week** and
- **using exercises from a program shown to reduce falls.**



Examples of balance exercises include

- Backward walking
- Sideways walking
- Heel walking
- Toe walking
- Standing from a sitting position.

Tai chi may also help prevent falls.

For more information on preventing falls, please visit: www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/preventadultfalls.htm. On this site you will find

- Tips for older adults, families, and caregivers to prevent falls
- Fact sheets, case studies, posters, and a podcast on preventing falls

Ways for Older Adults to Get Physical Activity

To help older adults understand the guidelines and to encourage them to add physical activity to their lives, the following materials are available at: www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity.

- Tips on getting active
- Tips on strength training
- Tips for staying on track
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and resources

Along with the CDC Web site, the following Health and Human Services (HHS) Web site has information and tools to help older adults become active: www.health.gov/PAGuidelines.

On this website, you will find:

The **2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans Toolkit** to assist organizations in promoting the physical activity guidelines.

- Users Guide – Promoting the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans in Your Community: A Guide to Building Awareness and Participation
- *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* booklet
- *Be Active Your Way: A Guide for Adults*
- *Be Active Your Way: A Fact Sheet for Adults*
- *At-A-Glance: A Fact Sheet for Professionals*
- Posters, event flyers, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)