

# Why you should exercise

**A**re you a couch potato? Does the thought of exercise leave you cold? Do your children spend more time in front of a TV, computer, or video game than they do being physically active?

If you're like most Americans, you answered yes to at least one of those questions. More than 60% of American adults do not get the recommended amount of physical activity, and nearly half of American youth are not active on a regular basis.

Physical activity and exercise – along with eating sensibly – is the key to not only losing weight and staying fit, but also improving your overall health and preventing illness. So if your goal is to lose weight, maintain

your weight, or just to be healthy, exercising at least 20 minutes a day at least 3 times a week can help to improve your health.

As researchers report in the January 27, 1999, issue of *JAMA*, even lifestyle activities – such as taking a brisk walk around the block, raking leaves, and taking the stairs instead of an elevator – offer similar health benefits and can be a suitable alternative to more vigorous exercise for people who are not able or who don't like to perform vigorous exercise.

Remember, *some* activity is better than no activity – no matter what level of physical activity you are able to do. Consult your doctor for advice on the best exercise level for you.

## HEALTH BENEFITS OF EXERCISE:

- Helps prevent heart disease and stroke by improving cholesterol levels, blood flow, and heart function.
- Helps to reduce blood pressure in those with high blood pressure by reducing body fat.
- Helps prevent and control adult-onset diabetes by reducing body fat.
- Combined with proper nutrition, helps to control weight and prevent obesity, which is a risk factor for many diseases.
- Prevents bone loss and osteoporosis by promoting bone formation.
- May help to prevent back pain by improving the back's strength, flexibility, and endurance.
- Can increase self-esteem and energy, improve mood, and decrease stress.

Age (in years)	Target Exercise Heart Rate (50%-75%)	Maximum Exercise Heart Rate (100%)
20-30	98 → 146	195
31-40	93 → 138	185
41-50	88 → 131	175
51-60	83 → 123	165
61+	78 → 116	155

To effectively lose body fat, you must exercise vigorously enough to raise your heart rate to your target zone. The numbers are in beats per minute.

Additional Sources: National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, Shape Up America!

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## HOW TO GET STARTED:

- If you have not been physically active, start slowly and gradually increase the time and the pace of your activity.
- Choose an activity that you enjoy and do it at a convenient time. Choose a variety of exercises so that you won't get bored.
- Exercise regularly. To get the most health benefit, you should exercise for at least 20 minutes 3 times a week.
- Get your family and children involved in regular exercise. Children of active parents are more likely to be active and stay active as adults.

## WHEN TO BE CAREFUL:

If done correctly, exercise can be safe for almost everyone. Consult your doctor about what level and types of physical activities are safe for you:

- If you are pregnant
- If you are taking any type of medication, especially for high blood pressure or heart disease
- If you have any medical condition, such as arthritis, that may be aggravated by exercise

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- American College of Sports Medicine SASE (business size) to: *Fitting Fitness In, Even When You're Pressed for Time* P.O. Box 1440 Indianapolis, IN 46206 or [www.acsm.org](http://www.acsm.org)
- Shape Up America! 6707 Democracy Blvd., Suite 306 Bethesda, MD 20817 or [www.shapeup.org](http://www.shapeup.org)

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