



Exercise

Regular physical activity is related to improved mental and physical well-being. Recent research indicates that active and physically fit individuals do not react to difficult situations with as much stress as inactive people. Regular exercise programs have been found to prevent, and reduce symptoms, of disease. These include reduced risk of heart disease, low back pain, depression and osteoporosis, to mention only a few. In addition, an active lifestyle improves sleep, mood, and self-esteem by increasing energy, facilitating weight loss and providing for greater social contact. Finally, aerobic exercise improves endurance and cardiovascular health while anaerobic activities enhance flexibility and strength.

Physical activity need not be strenuous to be of benefit. Indeed, all of us have many opportunities to become more active in our daily routine. Climb the stairs instead of taking the elevator. Walk to the store instead of driving. It's never too late to become active. If you are already active, keep at it. If you are not, start!

Here are some tips to help you develop an exercise program:

- **Get a physical.** Before starting, ask your physician about any limitations on your activity.
- **Be realistic.** If haven't been active before, don't try to do a marathon. Choose something that pushes your limits a bit, but that you can do. If you want to engage in a team sport or recreational activity, ensure that you have easy access to the people, the facility and the equipment.
- **Pick the right activities.** The biggest challenge is keeping at it. Pick activities that you really enjoy. Ideally, alternate between aerobic (cardiovascular) exercise (in which your heart rate accelerates into a target range for 20 minutes or more) and anaerobic exercise (such as weight training or yoga).
- **Vary your activities.** Pick more than one activity and alternate them. Include at least one thing you can do when the weather is poor, and have ideas for both summer and winter. Experiment. If you haven't tried something before, give it a shot (but use caution to avoid beginner injuries). Remind yourself that if you don't like it you can switch to something else.
- **Stretch first.** Learn how to do stretching exercises properly, and then make sure to do them before each exercise session. This can help reduce the likelihood of exercise-related pain or injury.
- **Exercise with a friend.** Or make new friends when you exercise. This will increase your motivation and enjoyment of your activities.



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- **Frequency is more important than duration.** Regular short periods of exercise (three to four times a week) are better than irregular long periods.

Warning! In addition to changes in mood, exercise can have a number of *side effects* -- such as increased health and longevity, greater energy, and reduced susceptibility to injury!