

Why Should I Be Physically Active?

If your doctor has advised you to begin an activity program, you should follow that advice. People who don't get enough physical activity are much more likely to develop health problems.

Regular, moderate physical activity can lower your risk of...

- Heart disease and heart attack
- High blood pressure
- High total cholesterol and low HDL (good) cholesterol.
- Overweight or obesity
- Diabetes
- Stroke



If you haven't been active and want to start exercising, first check with your doctor for a program that's right for you. Once you start, you'll find that exercise isn't just good for your health — it's also fun!

What else can physical activity do for me?

Physical activity also offers these benefits:

- Strengthens your heart, lungs, bones and muscles.
- Gives you more energy and strength.
- Helps control your weight and blood pressure.
- Helps you handle stress.
- Helps you sleep better.
- Helps you look good.
- Helps you feel upbeat.

What kind of activities should I do?

You don't have to be an athlete to lower your risk of heart disease and stroke! If done on most or all days, you can benefit from moderate activities like these:

- Pleasure walking
- Gardening and yard work
- Moderate to heavy housework
- Pleasure dancing and home exercise

More vigorous exercise can help improve the fitness of your heart and lungs. Start slowly, and build up as your heart gets stronger. First, discuss exercise with your doctor or nurse.

Then try one or more of these:

- Brisk walking, hiking or jogging
- Stair climbing
- Bicycling, swimming or rowing
- Aerobic dancing or cross-country skiing

How often should I exercise?

- Work up to 30 to 60 minutes of activity.
 - Make sure it's regular — most or all days of the week.
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What else can I do?

Look for ways to add more activity to your daily routines. Making small changes in your lifestyle can make a big overall difference in your health. Here are some examples:

- Take a walk for 10 or 15 minutes during your lunch break.
 - Take stairs instead of escalators and elevators.
 - Park farther from the store and walk through the parking lot.
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How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or health care professional. Or call your American Heart Association at 1-800-242-8721, or the American Stroke Association at 1-888-478-7653.
 - If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
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Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

- Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your doctor. For example:

What's the best type of exercise for me?

How much should I exercise?
