Physical Activity for Life

The evidence is growing and is more convincing than ever! People of all ages who are generally inactive can improve their health and well-being by becoming active at a moderate-intensity on a regular basis.

Regular physical activity substantially reduces the risk of dying of coronary heart disease, the nation’s leading cause of death, and decreases the risk for stroke, colon cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure. It also helps to control weight; contributes to healthy bones, muscles, and joints; reduces falls among older adults; helps to relieve the pain of arthritis; reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression; and is associated with fewer hospitalizations, physician visits, and medications. Moreover, physical activity need not be strenuous to be beneficial; people of all ages benefit from participating in regular, moderate-intensity physical activity, such as 30 minutes of brisk walking five or more times a week.

Despite the proven benefits of physical activity, more than 50% of American adults do not get enough physical activity to provide health benefits. 25% of adults are not active at all in their leisure time. Activity decreases with age and is less common among women than men and among those with lower income and less education. Furthermore, there are racial and ethnic differences in physical activity rates, particularly among women. For more information about adult U.S. physical activity levels among demographic groups in a state or metropolitan area, search the U.S. Physical Activity Statistics database.

Insufficient physical activity is not limited to adults. More than a third of young people in grades 9-12 do not regularly engage in vigorous-intensity physical activity. Daily participation in high school physical education classes dropped from 42% in 1991 to 32% in 2001 (CDC, 2002).
Why Should I Be Active?

Physical activity can bring you many health benefits. People who enjoy participating in moderate-intensity or vigorous-intensity physical activity on a regular basis benefit by lowering their risk of developing coronary heart disease, stroke, non-insulin-dependent (type 2) diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure, and colon cancer by 30-50% (USDHHS, 1996). Additionally, active people have lower premature death rates than people who are the least active.

Regular physical activity can improve health and reduce the risk of premature death in the following ways:

- Reduces the risk of developing coronary heart disease (CHD) and the risk of dying from CHD
- Reduces the risk of stroke
- Reduces the risk of having a second heart attack in people who have already had one heart attack
- Lowers both total blood cholesterol and triglycerides and increases high-density lipoproteins (HDL or the “good” cholesterol)
- Lowers the risk of developing high blood pressure
- Helps reduce blood pressure in people who already have hypertension
- Lowers the risk of developing non-insulin-dependent (type 2) diabetes mellitus
- Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer
- Helps people achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety
- Promotes psychological well-being and reduces feelings of stress
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints
- Helps older adults become stronger and better able to move about without falling or becoming excessively fatigued

Can a lack of physical activity hurt your health? Evidence shows that those who are not physically active are definitely not helping their health, and may likely be hurting it. The closer we look at the health risks associated with a lack of physical activity, the more convincing it is that Americans who are not yet regularly physically active should become active.

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How Can Your EAP Help?

Having trouble adding physical activity to your life? People Resources has trained specialists available to discuss these issues with you and help you develop a plan for success. You can call 1-800-765-9124 any time.

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