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Benefits of Exercise

We have all heard it many times before -- regular exercise is good for you, and it can help you manage your weight. But if you are like many Americans, you are busy, you sit most of the day at your job, and you haven't yet changed your exercise habits. The good news is that it's never too late to start. You can start slowly, and find ways to fit more physical activity into your life. To get the most benefit, you should try to get the **recommended amount of physical activity** [<https://medlineplus.gov/howmuchexercisedoneed.html>] for your age. If you can do that, the payoff is that you will feel better, may help prevent or control many diseases, and will likely even live longer.

What are the health benefits of exercise?

Regular exercise and physical activity may:

- **Help you get to and stay at a healthy weight** [<https://medlineplus.gov/weightcontrol.html>] . Along with diet, exercise plays an important role in maintaining a healthy weight and preventing obesity [<https://medlineplus.gov/obesity.html>] . If you are at a healthy weight, you can maintain it if the calories you eat and drink are equal to the amount of energy you burn. To lose weight, you need to use more calories than you eat and drink.
- **Reduce your risk of heart diseases**. [<https://medlineplus.gov/howtopreventheartdisease.html>] Exercise strengthens your heart and improves your circulation. The increased blood flow raises the oxygen levels in your body. This helps lower your risk of heart diseases [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartdiseases.html>] such as coronary artery disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/coronaryarterydisease.html>] and heart attack [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartattack.html>] . Regular exercise can also lower high blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/highbloodpressure.html>] , cholesterol [<https://medlineplus.gov/cholesterol.html>] , and triglyceride [<https://medlineplus.gov/triglycerides.html>] levels, all of which are risk factors for heart disease.
- **Help your body manage blood glucose** [<https://medlineplus.gov/bloodglucose.html>] (**blood sugar**) and **insulin levels**. Exercise can lower your blood glucose levels and help your insulin work better. This can reduce your risk of metabolic syndrome [<https://medlineplus.gov/metabolicsyndrome.html>] and type 2 diabetes [<https://medlineplus.gov/diabetestype2.html>] . And if you already have one of these diseases, exercise can help you to manage it.
- **Help you manage a chronic health condition**. For example, regular physical activity may help reduce pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/chronicpain.html>] and improve function in adults with **arthritis** [<https://medlineplus.gov/arthritis.html>] . It can also help support daily living activities for people with **disabilities** [<https://medlineplus.gov/disabilities.html>] . This may help them to be more independent.
- **Help you quit smoking** [<https://medlineplus.gov/quittingsmoking.html>] . Exercise may make it easier to quit smoking by reducing your cravings and withdrawal symptoms. It can also help limit the weight you might gain when you stop smoking.
- **Improve your mental health and mood**. During exercise, your body releases chemicals that can improve your mood and make you feel more relaxed. This can help you deal with **stress** [<https://medlineplus.gov/stress.html>] , **manage anxiety** [<https://medlineplus.gov/anxiety.html>] , and reduce your risk of **depression** [<https://medlineplus.gov/depression.html>] .

- **Help keep your thinking, learning, and judgment skills sharp as you age.** Exercise stimulates your body to release proteins and other chemicals that improve the structure and function of your brain.
- **Strengthen your bones and muscles.** Regular exercise can help kids and teens build strong bones. Later in life, it can also slow the loss of bone density [<https://medlineplus.gov/bonedensity.html>] that comes with age. Doing muscle-strengthening activities can help you increase or maintain your muscle mass and strength.
- **Reduce your risk of some cancers,** including colon [<https://medlineplus.gov/colorectalcancer.html>] , breast [<https://medlineplus.gov/breastcancer.html>] , uterine [<https://medlineplus.gov/uterinecancer.html>] , bladder [<https://medlineplus.gov/bladdercancer.html>] , esophageal [<https://medlineplus.gov/esophagealcancer.html>] , kidney [<https://medlineplus.gov/kidneycancer.html>] , stomach [<https://medlineplus.gov/stomachcancer.html>] , and lung [<https://medlineplus.gov/lungcancer.html>] cancer. There are different ways that physical activity may lower the risk of these cancers. For example, it can strengthen your immune system [<https://medlineplus.gov/immunesystemanddisorders.html>] and reduce inflammation in your body. It also helps prevent obesity, which is a risk factor for many cancers.
- **Reduce your risk of falls** [<https://medlineplus.gov/falls.html>] . For older adults, doing balance and muscle-strengthening activities can help reduce your risk of falling.
- Improve your sleep. [<https://medlineplus.gov/healthysleep.html>] Exercise can help you to fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer.
- **Improve your sexual health.** Regular exercise may lower the risk of erectile dysfunction [<https://medlineplus.gov/erectiledysfunction.html>] (ED) in men. For those who already have ED, exercise may help improve their sexual function. In women, exercise may increase sexual arousal.
- **Increase your chances of living longer.** Studies show that physical activity can reduce your risk of dying early from the leading causes of death, like heart disease and certain cancers.

How can I make exercise a part of my regular routine?

Here are some tips to help you make exercise part of your regular routine:

- **Make everyday activities more active.** Even small changes can help. You can take the stairs instead of the elevator. Walk down the hall to a coworker's office instead of sending an email. Wash the car yourself. Park further away from your destination.
- **Be active with friends and family.** Having a workout partner may make you more likely to enjoy exercise. You can also plan social activities that involve exercise. You might also consider joining an exercise group or class, such as a dance class, hiking club, or volleyball team.
- **Keep track of your progress.** Keeping a log of your activity or using a fitness tracker may help you set goals and stay motivated.
- **Make exercise more fun.** Try listening to music or watching TV while you exercise. Also, mix things up a little bit - if you stick with just one type of exercise, you might get bored. Try doing a combination of activities.
- **Find activities that you can do even when the weather is bad.** You can walk in a mall, climb stairs, or work out in a gym even if the weather stops you from exercising outside.
- **Remember that some physical activity is better than none.** Do what you can! Even 5 minutes of physical activity has real health benefits.

Learn More

- Benefits of Physical Activity [<https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/benefits/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Exercise and Bone Health [<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/staying-healthy/exercise-and-bone-health>] (American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons)

- Exercise, lifestyle, and your bones [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000492.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000492.htm>]
- Fitness Facts & Fiction Quiz [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/007165_45.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/007165_100.htm]
- Health Benefits of Exercise and Physical Activity [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-and-physical-activity/health-benefits-exercise-and-physical-activity>]  (National Institute on Aging)
- Staying Active at Any Size [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/staying-active-at-any-size>]  (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/control-de-peso/como-mantenerse-activo-independientemente-peso>]
- Why Exercise? [<https://familydoctor.org/why-exercise/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/por-que-debo-hacer-ejercicio/?adfree=true>]
- Working Out to Stay Sharp: Can Exercise Keep Your Brain Healthier? [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2025/01/working-out-stay-sharp>] 

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Game or exercise: Which drives the emotional benefits in a single... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40753984>]
- Article: Biological maturation determines the beneficial effects of high-intensity functional training on... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40746615>]
- Article: Exercise Interventions in Breast Cancer: Molecular Mechanisms, Physical Benefits, and Practical... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40731797>]
- Benefits of Exercise -- see more articles [[https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=exercise\[majr\]+AND+english\[la\]+AND+humans\[mh\]+\(benefit\[ti\]+OR+benefits\[ti\]+OR+beneficial\[ti\]\)+NOT+\(letter\[pt\]+OR+editorial\[pt\]+editorial\[pt\]\)+AND+%22last+2+Years%22\[edat\]](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=exercise[majr]+AND+english[la]+AND+humans[mh]+(benefit[ti]+OR+benefits[ti]+OR+beneficial[ti])+NOT+(letter[pt]+OR+editorial[pt]+editorial[pt])+AND+%22last+2+Years%22[edat])]

Patient Handouts

- Give your heart a workout [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000763.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000763.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Exercise and immunity [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007165.htm>]

Physical Exercise [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/physical-exercise>]

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