

FitFacts®

How to Start an Exercise Program

IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT PEOPLE WHO EXERCISE REGULARLY WEIGH LESS AND HAVE A REDUCED RISK FOR HEART DISEASE, DIABETES, AND CANCER. BUT DID YOU ALSO KNOW THAT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RELIEVES PAIN FROM ARTHRITIS, IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN MEDICATIONS FOR TREATMENT OF DEPRESSION, BUILDS STRONG BONES, AND THE LIST GOES ON? SIMPLY PUT, PEOPLE WHO ARE REGULARLY ACTIVE FEEL BETTER, ENJOY BETTER HEALTH, AND LIVE LONGER.

Leading health and fitness organizations agree that adults should engage in a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week. If you are ready to work towards this goal but aren't sure how to begin, the following tips will help you get started.

1. **Get the “okay” from your health care provider.** If you are unsure whether you are healthy enough to begin an exercise program, discuss this with your health care provider first.
2. **Choose activities that you enjoy.** This will make it much easier to stick with the program. Vary your activities to avoid boredom or burnout.
3. **Start low and go slow.** Begin with small amounts of low intensity exercise. For example, an inactive person could start by walking at a regular pace for 5 minutes twice a day, 5 days per week. Slowly increase the amount of time and intensity.

[Episodes of activity should eventually last at least 10 minutes and be performed on 3 or more days of the week]

4. **Up the intensity.** Use a 0-10 scale to rate the intensity of your activity (0=sitting, 10=highest level of effort possible). Once you can easily complete low intensity activity, you are ready to increase your effort.
 - **Moderate intensity** activity rates 5 or 6. You can talk comfortably but not sing. [examples: brisk walking, biking less than 10 miles/hour, gardening, ballroom dancing]
 - **Vigorous intensity** *activity rates 7 or 8. You can only speak a few words before taking a breath. [examples: race walking, jogging, running, biking 10 miles/hour or faster, tennis (singles), heavy gardening, swimming laps]
5. **Flex those muscles.** Resistance or weight training will help strengthen muscles, build sturdy bones, and increase your metabolism.
 - Strengthen all major muscle groups twice a week (legs, hips, back, chest, abdomen, shoulders, arms). This is in addition to the aerobic activity goal.
 - Perform 8-12 repetitions of each exercise. Do multiple sets to build more strength.



6. **Plan ahead.** At the start of each week, look at your schedule and write in where your physical activity will fit the best.
7. **Chart your progress.** Keep track of your activity on a calendar or activity log. It is motivating to see your progress as you increase the frequency, intensity, and amount of time spent doing physical activity.
8. **Ditch the “all-or-nothing” mentality.** Even if you can't meet your weekly goal for activity and strength training, doing something is always better than nothing. Refer to the FitFact, “Small ways to increase physical activity” for ideas on how to make activity a part of your daily routine.

*1 minute of vigorous activity= 2 minutes of moderate activity. For example, 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week may be substituted for 150 minutes of moderate activity.

For more information on how to begin aerobic exercise and strength training, please visit our website at www.acefitness.org.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Council on Exercise](http://www.acefitness.org)

[U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](http://www.hhs.gov)