



NUTRI-BYTES

Physical Activity: The Health Connection

Are you willing to invest 30 minutes a day in your health? According to studies, 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week will lower your chances of having a stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, colon cancer, and several other medical conditions. Besides improving your health, regular physical activity will help to strengthen muscles, improve balance, slow bone loss, improve sleep patterns, reduce stress, and build confidence. If you are trying to lose or maintain weight, you might want to burn more calories by engaging in 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous activity on most days (and of course you need to control your caloric intake also).

What type of activity is recommended?

A comprehensive physical activity program includes 3 types of activity:

- **Aerobic activity** – this activity uses large muscles and causes the body to use more oxygen than it would at rest. This exercise is great for heart health. Examples are brisk walking, swimming, and bicycling. Include some aerobic activity in your daily routine.
- **Resistance training** (also called strength training) – this type of activity can strengthen muscles and help maintain bone density, balance, and coordination. Examples are pushups, lunges, and bicep curls (with dumbbells). These exercises should be done on alternating days, 3 times per week.
- **Flexibility exercises** – this type of activity stretches muscle and improves joint and muscle flexibility. These exercises will help to prevent injury during aerobic activities. Be sure to stretch before and particularly *after* any aerobic activity.



How do I choose an activity? Well, your choice depends on several factors:

- ✓ **Fitness level** If you've been inactive, begin with less strenuous activities at a comfortable pace and *gradually* increase the activities' length and intensity to prevent strains and injuries.
- ✓ **Preference: individual or group activities?** If you enjoy groups, join a local fitness center and sign up for swimming, dancing, pilates, yoga, or aerobics classes. If you prefer individual activities such as walking or weight lifting, you might want to enlist an "exercise buddy" who will encourage you to continue your exercise plan.
- ✓ **Cost** Many activities are free or low cost. Check with your local park and recreation department for public parks, playgrounds, and nature preserves that offer walking paths, hiking trails, biking paths, or canoeing.
- ✓ **Weather** While outdoor activities are often appealing, have alternate plans for activities in your home or fitness center for those "bad weather" days.
- ✓ **Time of day** If possible, schedule your workouts for times when you feel most energetic. If you are pressed for time, remember that physical activity sessions can be spread out over the day in 10-minute bursts!



*Information from National Institutes of Health Publication No. 06-5714 (June, 2006)