



AMA Healthier Life Steps™

A physician-patient alliance for a longer, healthier life

Action plan for increasing physical activity

The goal

- Get moving!
- At least 2 ½ hours of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity each week, preferably spread throughout the week
- Muscle-strengthening activities that involve all major muscle groups, two or more days per week

Getting ready

Many people think being physically active means getting a gym membership, running a marathon or working out using a video, class or exercise machine. However, you can be more active by making small changes over time.

Becoming just a little more active can help you:

- Prevent and control chronic diseases, such as
 - High blood pressure
 - Heart disease
 - Stroke
 - Diabetes
 - Cancer
 - Osteoporosis (bone thinning)
 - Stress and anxiety
 - Depression
- Feel less tired and have more energy
- Reduce tension and improve your mood
- Become stronger
- Sleep better
- Keep a healthy weight
- Lose weight
- Improve balance and prevent injury



Think about what might hold you back from being more physically active. Plan ways to get around any barriers.

Possible barriers	Tips to get around these barriers
Not enough time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Plan ahead to add physical activity to your daily routine. ■ Start with activities that take only a few minutes. For example, park further away from your destination or stand while talking on the phone.
Not liking exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Try different activities until you find ones you like. ■ Invite a friend to participate in activities with you on a regular basis and make a note on your Progress Tracking Calendar.
Fear of injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Warm up and cool down for three to five minutes at the beginning and end of physical activities. ■ Start at an easy pace. Listen to your body. Be aware of warning signs of overexertion.

Taking action

Think about your typical activities over the past two weeks. Where do you feel you have the greatest chance of taking steps to become more physically active?

To begin your plan to become more active, choose one or two of the items listed below. Or add your own activities in the space provided.

- Park at the far end of the parking lot at work.
- Get on or off the bus several blocks away from work.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator at work or the shopping mall.
- Stretch at your desk a couple of times a day.
- Take a 10-minute walk once a day.
- Play actively with your kids or pets twice a week.
- Wash your car by hand instead of taking it to the car wash.
- _____
- _____

My first activity goal:

My start date:

Track your physical activities on your Progress Tracking Calendar.



Keep going

1. Make one new addition to your plan weekly or monthly, such as:
 - This week/month I will walk an extra five minutes during my lunchtime.
 - Next week/month I will stretch for 15 minutes while watching TV.
 - The following week/month I will stand while talking on the phone.
2. Gradually increase your activity levels.

Activity level	How to estimate intensity	Examples
Light	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Breathing and heart rate not significantly increased ■ Able to sing while doing the activity 	Walking slowly, dusting, vacuuming, light stretching, gardening or pruning, golfing with a powered cart
Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increases breathing and heart rate ■ Causes light sweating ■ Able to carry on a conversation comfortably 	Brisk walking, mowing the lawn with a power motor, golfing (pulling/carrying clubs), doubles tennis, scrubbing floors, washing windows, weight lifting
Vigorous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Causes heavy breathing and significant increase in heart rate ■ Too out of breath to carry on a conversation 	Race walking, jogging, running, swimming laps, mowing the lawn with a hand mower, bicycling uphill or faster than 10 mph

3. Gradually include muscle-strengthening activities for all the major muscle groups: legs, hips, back, chest, stomach, shoulders and arms. The exercises for each muscle group should be repeated eight to 12 times per session.
4. Look for ways to add other activities.
5. Write these planned changes on your Progress Tracking Calendar.
6. Refer to the resources listed below for tips that may help you make and follow your plan.



Factors for success

- Prepare for breaks in your plan (illness, busy at work, travel, vacations, etc.).
- Look for other activity options and do something small rather than nothing.
- Be realistic! Begin slowly and work your way gradually to your goals.
- Stick with it. If what you are doing is not working, try something else. Keep moving toward your goal of increasing physical activity.
- If walking is your choice, work your way up to 10,000 steps a day. Consider purchasing a pedometer or find walking programs in your community.
- If at any time you feel more than a little discomfort or pain, have difficulty breathing or feel your heart skipping beats, stop the activity and see your physician if any of these conditions persists.

Useful resources

- **US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
 - www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/life/index.htm
- **HealthierUS.gov**
 - www.healthierus.gov/exercise.html
- **US Department of Health and Human Services**
 - www.health.gov/paguidelines
 - www.smallstep.gov
- **President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports**
 - www.presidentschallenge.org
- **Shape Up America!**
 - www.shapeup.org/shape/steps.php
- **American Academy of Family Physicians**
 - <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/healthy/aim/food/849.printerview.html>
- **Exercise is Medicine™**
 - www.exerciseismedicine.org