

Becoming More Active

By setting small goals and changing daily habits, adopting a healthier lifestyle is easier than it might seem. Before setting off on your journey to health, here are a few facts and ideas to keep in mind.

Convincing Yourself to Begin

If the idea of changing your lifestyle seems intimidating, remind yourself why this path is important, and why it *can* work for you:

- **Your health depends on it:** Numerous studies have shown that sedentary living habits and low levels of physical fitness are associated with increased risk of diseases such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.
- **Fitness doesn't require joining an expensive gym or running a marathon (unless you want to!):** You don't have to perform vigorous exercise, nor do you have to pay a lot of money to go to exercise classes or a health club where you might feel self-conscious. Research has also shown that individuals can realize health and fitness benefits from moderate physical activities such as house or yard work, recreational activities, and even a few two-minute walks throughout the day.

Moderate activity is good for your health even if you don't lose weight. For example, independent of weight loss, it can:

- Increase energy and improve your ability to perform daily tasks
- Decrease risks for heart attack, stroke, breast cancer, endometrial cancer, colon cancer, and the pain of osteoarthritis
- Lower blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol
- Improve your self-esteem

Identify What Motivates You the Most

Make yourself a list of the benefits that motivate you the most:

- Do you want to feel better about yourself?
- Is there a family history of disease?
- Do you just want to get more done during the day?

These are all valid reasons to start changing your lifestyle, and there's no reason to delay.

10,000 Steps: Start Walking!

One of the easiest exercises you can do is walking, and one way to get started is to identify times and places that would allow for a two-minute walk several times a day, with the aim of

Adapted from content provided by J. Michael Gonzalez-Campoy, MD, PhD, FACE



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reaching 10,000 steps every day. Using a pedometer will help you track this daily goal. Here are a few suggestions for walking times:

- Park your car farther away from the entrance of your workplace, or if you take the bus, get off a stop or two early and walk the remaining distance to your destination.
- While at work, walk to talk with coworkers instead of using the phone or email. You can also walk on your break.
- Walk before breakfast, at lunch, and after dinner. Better yet, take company—your spouse, baby, dog, or a friend in the neighborhood.
- Walk during television commercials.
- Plan errands that require walking.

Don't Overdo It

While it might be exciting to realize that it's so easy to make simple changes to your daily habits, be careful not to overexert yourself at first.

Activity Prescription Levels (maximum heartrate is 220 minus your age)

- BMI 30-40: 80% of maximum heartrate
- BMI 40-45: 70% of maximum heartrate
- BMI 45-50: 60% of maximum heartrate
- BMI >50: 50% of maximum heartrate

Listen to Your Body

Being more active is very good for you and the benefits definitely outweigh the risks. However, there are risks, and you should pay attention to any adverse symptoms or reactions to a sudden change in your activity. Your body will need time to adapt, so some unpleasant symptoms are normal. Adjust activity or take precautions if you notice any of these symptoms:

- Nausea or vomiting after physical activity: reduce the intensity, prolong the cool-down, avoid eating for two hours before exercise
- Extreme breathlessness lasting >10 minutes after you stop exercising: next time, go slower and/or exercise for less time
- Prolonged fatigue up to 24 hours after exercise: reduce the intensity and duration of the activity



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Stop exercising and call your physician if you experience any of the following:

- Pain or pressure in the chest, arm, or throat during activity
- Extreme dizziness or lightheadedness, sudden lack of coordination, confusion, cold sweating, or fainting
- Abnormal shortness of breath with mild or moderate exertion
- Pain or “heartburn” in the upper abdomen

If you do injure yourself exercising, don’t push yourself and remember “RICE”:

- **R**est
- **I**ce
- **C**ompression
- **E**levation

See your physician if the pain is severe or lasts longer than you think it should. Causing further injury will only slow down your progress.

Most of all, use common sense.

In Summary

These are the very first steps in making positive changes to your lifestyle, so don’t feel bad about going slow. All it takes is a series of small steps towards your goals. The road ahead might seem bumpy and you might stumble along the way, but with common sense, motivation, and better health at the finish line, you will succeed in achieving the healthy, active lifestyle you deserve.

