

EXERCISE AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## How Older Adults Can Get Started with Exercise

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Deciding to become physically active can be one of the best things you can do for your health. Exercise and physical activity are not only great for your mental and physical health, but they can help keep you independent as you age. Now, let's talk about getting started.

### How Much Activity Do Older Adults Need?

According to the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#) (PDF, 14.5M) you should do at least **150 minutes (2 ½ hours) a week** of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise, like brisk walking or fast dancing. Being active at least 3 days a week is best, but doing anything is better than doing nothing at all. You should also do muscle-strengthening activities, like lifting weights or doing sit-ups, at least **2 days a week**. The Physical Activity Guidelines also recommend that as part of your weekly physical activity you combine multiple components of exercises. For example, try balance training as well as aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities. If you prefer vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (like running), aim for at least **75 minutes a week**.

### How Older Adults Can Get Started with Exercise

Exercise and physical activity are great for your mental and physical health and help keep you independent as you age. Here are a few things you may want to keep in mind when beginning to exercise.

#### Start Slowly When Beginning Exercise

The key to being successful and safe when beginning a physical activity routine is to build slowly from your current fitness level. Over-exercising can cause injury, which may lead to quitting. A steady rate of progress is the best approach.

To play it safe and reduce your risk of injury:



- Begin your exercise program slowly with low-intensity exercises.
- Warm up before exercising and cool down afterward.
- Pay attention to your surroundings when [exercising outdoors](#).
- [Drink water](#) before, during, and after your workout session, even if you don't feel thirsty. Play catch, kickball, basketball, or soccer.
- Wear [appropriate fitness clothes and shoes](#) for your activity.
- If you have specific health conditions, discuss your exercise and physical activity plan with your [health care provider](#).

Download and fill out the [Find Your Starting Point Activity Log](#) to document your starting point. You'll find space to track your normal activity levels for a few days—try and choose a few weekdays and one weekend day.



Don't forget to test your current fitness level for all [4 types of exercise](#)—endurance, balance, flexibility, and strength. You may be in shape for running, but if you're not stretching, you're not getting the maximum benefit from your exercise. Write down your results so you can track your progress as you continue to exercise.

Make notes about how these test exercises feel. If the exercises were hard, do what's comfortable and slowly build up. If they were easy, you know your level of fitness is higher. You can be more ambitious and challenge yourself.

Once you start exercising, use the [Monthly Progress Test](#) to check in and see how you are improving, and celebrate your successes!

Read and share this [infographic](#) to learn about the real life benefits of exercise.

increasing your level of activity? [Talk to your doctor](#) about the exercises and physical activities that are best for you. During your appointment, you can ask:

1. **Are there any exercises or activities I should avoid?** Your doctor can make recommendations based on your health history, keeping in mind any recent surgeries or ongoing health conditions such as [arthritis](#), [diabetes](#), or [heart disease](#). This would be a great time to check with your doctor about any unexplained symptoms you've been

### 3 Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Exercise

Are you considering adding exercise to your daily routine or significantly

experiencing, such as chest pain or pressure, joint pain, dizziness, or shortness of breath. Your doctor may recommend postponing exercise until the problem is diagnosed and treated.

2. **Is my preventive care up to date?** Your doctor can tell you if there are any tests you might need. For example, women over age 65 should be checked regularly for [osteoporosis](#).
3. **How does my health condition affect my ability to exercise?** Some health conditions can affect your exercise routine. For example, people with arthritis may need to avoid some types of activity, especially when joints are swollen or inflamed. Those with diabetes may need to adjust their daily schedule, meal plan, or medications when planning their activities. Your doctor can talk to you about any adjustments you need to make to ensure that you get the most out of your new exercise routine.

## How to Set Fitness Goals

Many people find that having a firm goal in mind motivates them to move ahead on a project. Goals are most useful when they are specific, realistic, and important to you. Be sure to review your goals regularly as you make progress or your priorities change.

Download and use the [Goal-Setting Worksheet](#) to document where you want to be in both the short-and long-term.

### Write Down Your Short-Term Fitness Goals

Short-term goals will help you make physical activity a regular part of your daily life. For these goals, think about the things you'll need to get or do in order to be physically active. For example, you may need to buy [walking shoes](#) or fill out an [Activity Log](#) so you can figure out how to fit physical activity into your busy day. Make sure your short-term goals will really help you be active. Here are a few examples of short-term goals:

- Today, I will decide to be more active.
- Tomorrow, I will find out about exercise classes in my area.
- By the end of this week, I will talk with my friend about exercising with me a couple of times a week.
- In the next 2 weeks, I will make sure I have the shoes and comfortable clothes I need to start walking for exercise.

### Write Down Your Long-Term Goals

After you write down your short-term goals, you can go on to identify your long-term goals. Focus on where you want to be in 6 months, a year, or 2 years from now. Long-term goals also should be realistic, personal, and important to you. Here are a few examples:

- By this time next year, I will swim 1 mile three times a week.
- Next summer, I will be able to play pitch and catch with my grandchildren.
- In 6 months, I will have my blood pressure under control by increasing my physical activity and following my doctor's advice.

## Write a Plan to Add Exercise and Physical Activity to Your Life

Some people find that writing an [exercise and physical activity plan](#) helps them keep their promise to be active, while some people can plunge into a new project without planning ahead. If you choose to make a plan be sure the plan is

## Carl's Story

For Carl, 75, being able to do the things he enjoys motivates him to exercise every day. “I lift weights with my personal trainer at my gym twice a week and do stretching exercises. I also like bowling and fishing. I exercise so I can stay fit. It also helps keep my muscles strong and I have more energy to get going each day.”

realistic for you to do, especially as you gain experience in how to be active. You might even make a contract with a friend or family member to carry out your plan. Involving another person can help you keep your commitment.

Check out the interactive [Activity Planner](#) from the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services' Move Your Way campaign. It lets you build a weekly physical activity plan and then print it out. You can choose from a variety of fun and exciting endurance (aerobic) and strength exercises, personalize your activities by location and purpose, and indicate how much of each exercise you will do. Once you create your plan, don't forget to add in balance and flexibility exercises.

## Review and Update Your Exercise Plan Regularly

Regularly review and update your plan and long-term goals so that you can build on your success. Adjust your plan as you progress or if your schedule changes. You may find that things like vacation or illness can [interrupt your physical activity routine](#). Don't get discouraged! You can start exercising again and be successful. You can use a [Weekly Exercise and Physical Activity Plan](#) to write down your activities.

## For More Information About Exercise and Physical Activity

### Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP)

[240-453-8280](tel:240-453-8280)

[odphpinfo@hhs.gov](mailto:odphpinfo@hhs.gov)

<http://health.gov>

### American Council on Exercise

[1-888-825-3636](tel:1-888-825-3636) (toll-free)

[receptionist@acefitness.org](mailto:receptionist@acefitness.org)

[www.acefitness.org](http://www.acefitness.org)

## Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

[1-800-232-4636](tel:1-800-232-4636) (toll-free)

[1-888-232-6348](tel:1-888-232-6348) (TTY/toll-free)

[cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

## MedlinePlus

National Library of Medicine

[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)

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