



## **Lifestyle Risk Factors: Physical Activity**



Keeping Connecticut Healthy  
[www.ct.gov/dph](http://www.ct.gov/dph)

### **Why is this important?**

Decades of research have shown that regular physical activity can have a positive effect on many of the leading causes of disease, disability and death. Yet over 50% of American adults do not get enough physical activity—and over 25% are not active at all.

- ❖ Regular physical activity helps:
  - control diabetes and obesity;
  - strengthen your heart and lungs;
  - reduce blood pressure and cholesterol levels;
  - build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints;
  - decrease the risk of breast & colorectal cancer, and osteoporosis;
  - promote psychological well-being, improve mood and ease depression; and,
  - increase energy, manage pain and stress, and even help you sleep better and live longer.
- ❖ Research suggests that physical activity may also protect against work-related repetitive strain injuries by strengthening the bones and muscles, and fostering better balance of movement.
- ❖ Health care costs associated with lack of physical activity exceed \$75 billion each year. It is estimated that people who are not physically active have nearly 25% higher health care costs than active individuals.
- ❖ If only 1 in 10 Connecticut adults started a regular walking program, the state would save \$82 million in heart disease-related expenditures annually—equivalent to paying the college tuition of nearly 15,000 Connecticut students each year.

**There are 1,440 minutes in every day.  
Why not invest 30 of them in physical activity?**

(See the [Online Resources](#) section for additional information.)

## How does this affect me?



*Physical activity is the best deal going.  
It's free or low cost,  
and can be done almost anywhere,  
at any time, by anyone.*

- Physical activity is important regardless of your age, sex, size or ability. In fact, it is one of the very best things you can do for your body and your mind. It helps prevent or manage high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, stroke, arthritis, diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, and even some cancers.
- The lack of adequate physical activity—[physical inactivity](#)—is more common among:
  - women than men;
  - blacks & Hispanics than whites;
  - those with lower incomes; and,
  - those with less education.
- Physical inactivity increases with age. By age 75, 1 in 3 men and 1 in 2 women engage in no regular physical activity.
- With regular physical activity, older adults can improve and maintain strength, balance, flexibility and agility, thus reducing the risk of falls and fractures, and helping to maintain their independence and quality of life.
- Research suggests that physical activity may also boost brainpower by building new brain cells in a region linked with memory and memory loss.

The [2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#) (HHS) lists the following major research findings on the health benefits of physical activity (pp. vi –vii):

- Regular physical activity reduces the risk of many adverse health outcomes.
- Some physical activity is better than none.
- For most health outcomes, additional benefits occur as the amount of physical activity increases through higher intensity, greater frequency, and/or longer duration.
- Most health benefits occur with at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. Additional benefits occur with more physical activity.
- Both aerobic (endurance) and muscle-strengthening (resistance) physical activity are beneficial.
- Health benefits occur for children and adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, older adults, and those in every studied racial and ethnic group.
- The health benefits of physical activity occur for people with disabilities.
- The benefits of physical activity far outweigh the possibility of adverse outcomes.

(See the [Facts & Figures](#) section for additional data.)

## Take Control: Take More Steps!

1. **Have fun.** Begin slowly & increase gradually. Drink enough water to stay hydrated. Use good judgment. See your health care provider before starting if you are 50 or older, overweight or sedentary, have chronic disease, or any concerns about your health or safety.
2. **Choose to move, rather than be moved.** Walk, don't ride. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. You'll feel more confident, have more energy, and serve as a positive role model for family and friends.
3. **Cut down on "screen time".** Track and limit the time you spend watching TV, surfing the web or playing computer games. How sedentary are you? Lighten up! Play more. Move more.
4. **Incorporate more physical movement** into your usual daily activities. Put on your favorite dance music while you're doing the same ole' chores; speed it up a beat. Wash the car, move the couch, rake the yard, wash the windows, clean out the closet, mow the lawn. Make it fun, faster and fitter.
5. **Walk.** Grab a friend, colleague or family member—or the family dog (or the neighbor's dog). Invest your work break in a brisk 10 – 15 minute walk. You'll be sharper, stronger and more relaxed. Get a pedometer to measure your progress and help keep you motivated to take more steps.
6. **Push, pull, lift.** Build your strength. Grab some weights or make your own. Do it while walking, watching TV, or even talking on the phone. Begin slowly, and increase gradually. Use lighter weights and do more repetitions. Listen to your body. Breathe.
7. **Stretch & bend.** Loosen up. Do some yoga stretches. Take a class, rent a video, buy a book, or follow along with a yoga program on TV or the Internet. You'll increase your flexibility and range of motion while reducing stress and improving mental performance. Relax, breathe & enjoy.
8. **Improve your balance.** Balance on one foot; balance on the other. Balance on your toes; balance on your heels. Stand with one foot in front of the other, heel touching toes. Hold on to the counter or a chair back for support if needed. Try yoga, tai chi or Pilates. Good balance helps prevent falls and fractures.
9. **Volunteer.** Invest some time helping to improve your community. Tidy up the bus stop, the school grounds or local community park. Help landscape the local library, playground or senior center. Open the school gym to the public. Make your community more "walk-able" and pedestrian friendly.
10. **Remember:** Frequency and consistency are more important than intensity when you are starting out. Take it slow and easy to build up your strength and endurance and improve your balance and flexibility.



## Know Your Goals!

### Physical Activity Guidelines for Healthy Adults aged 18 – 65 years

#### Leisure-Time Physical Activity:

Maintain a physically active lifestyle  
**to promote and maintain good health.**

#### Aerobic Activity:

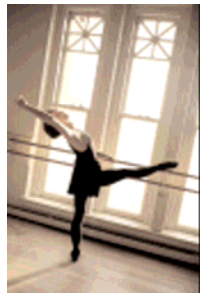
Engage in moderate-intensity aerobic activity for at least  
150 minutes (2 hours & 30 minutes) a week –  
or vigorous-intensity aerobic activity for at least  
75 minutes (1 hour & 15 minutes) a week –  
or an equivalent combination of moderate-  
& vigorous-intensity aerobic activity,  
**for heart & lung health.**

#### Strength Building:

Perform moderate or high intensity  
muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week,  
using the major muscles of the body, to enhance or maintain  
**muscle strength & endurance.**

#### Screen Time:

Limit leisure screen time to no more than 2 hours a day.



**Note:** These are minimum recommendations.  
Greater health benefits may be achieved by engaging in  
physical activity of more vigorous intensity or longer duration.

References: Active Aging Partnership; American Academy of Family Physicians; American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons; American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine; American College of Sports Medicine; American Heart Association; Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; Centers for Disease Control & Prevention; Council of State Governments; Healthy People 2010; InShape Indiana; Institute of Medicine; International Institute on Active Aging; Kaiser Family Foundation; Mayo Clinic; MedlinePlus; National Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance; National Center on Physical Activity & Disability; National Governors Association; National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute; National Institute on Aging; President's Council on Physical Fitness & Sports; The President's Challenge; Trust for America's Health; U.S. Federal Trade Commission.

*Last reviewed/updated: 10/09/2008*

2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

Following are the key Guidelines included in the [2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#) (HHS, pp. vii-viii), by group:

**Key Guidelines for Children & Adolescents:**

- Children and adolescents should do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity daily.
  - [Aerobic](#): most of the 60 or more minutes a day should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, and should include vigorous-intensity physical activity at least 3 days a week.
  - [Muscle-strengthening](#): as part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include muscle-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week.
  - [Bone-strengthening](#): as part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include bone-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week.
- It is important to encourage young people to participate in physical activities that are appropriate for their age, that are enjoyable, and that offer variety.

**Key Guidelines for Adults:**

- All adults should avoid inactivity. Some physical activity is better than none, and adults who participate in any amount of physical activity gain some health benefits.
- For substantial health benefits, adults should do at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. Aerobic activity should be performed in episodes of at least 10 minutes, and preferably, it should be spread throughout the week.
- For additional and more extensive health benefits, adults should increase their aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes (5 hours) a week of moderate-intensity, or 150 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity. Additional health benefits are gained by engaging in physical activity beyond this amount.
- Adults should also do muscle-strengthening activities that are moderate or high intensity and involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week, as these activities provide additional health benefits.

**Key Guidelines for Older Adults:**

The Key Guidelines for Adults also apply to older adults. In addition, the following Guidelines are just for older adults.

- When older adults cannot do 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week because of chronic conditions, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow.
- Older adults should do exercises that maintain or improve balance if they are at risk of falling.
- Older adults should determine their level of effort for physical activity relative to their level of fitness.
- Older adults with chronic conditions should understand whether and how their conditions affect their ability to do regular physical activity safely.

### **Key Guidelines for Women during Pregnancy & the Postpartum Period:**

- Healthy women who are not already highly active or doing vigorous-intensity activity should get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Preferably, this activity should be spread throughout the week.
- Pregnant women who habitually engage in vigorous-intensity aerobic activity or who are highly active can continue physical activity during pregnancy and the postpartum period, provided that they remain healthy and discuss with their health care provider how and when activity should be adjusted over time.

### **Key Guidelines for Adults with Disabilities:**

- Adults with disabilities, who are able to, should get at least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. Aerobic activity should be performed in episodes of at least 10 minutes, and preferably, it should be spread throughout the week.
- Adults with disabilities, who are able to, should also do muscle-strengthening activities of moderate or high intensity that involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week, as these activities provide additional health benefits.
- When adults with disabilities are not able to meet the Guidelines, they should engage in regular physical activity according to their abilities and should avoid inactivity.
- Adults with disabilities should consult their health care provider about the amounts and types of physical activity that are appropriate for their abilities.

### **Key Guidelines for People with Chronic Medical Conditions:**

- Adults with chronic conditions obtain important health benefits from regular physical activity.
- When adults with chronic conditions do activity according to their abilities, physical activity is safe.
- Adults with chronic conditions should be under the care of a health care provider. People with chronic conditions and symptoms should consult their health care provider about the types and amounts of activity appropriate for them.

### **Key Guidelines for Safe Physical Activity:**

To do physical activity safely and reduce the risk of injuries and other adverse events, people should:

- Understand the risks and yet be confident that physical activity is safe for almost everyone.
- Choose to do types of physical activity that are appropriate for their current fitness level and health goals, because some activities are safer than others.
- Increase physical activity gradually over time whenever more activity is necessary to meet Guidelines or health goals. Inactive people should “start low and go slow” by gradually increasing how often and how long activities are done.
- Protect themselves by using appropriate gear and sports equipment, looking for safe environments, following rules and policies, and making sensible choices about when, where, and how to be active.
- Be under the care of a health care provider if they have chronic conditions or symptoms. People with chronic conditions and symptoms should consult their health care provider about the types and amounts of activity appropriate for them.