

Making Physical Activity a Part of Your Routine

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What is physical activity and what can it do for me?

Physical activity includes anything that gets you moving, such as walking, dancing, or working in the yard. You can earn the benefits of being physically active without going to a gym, playing sports, or using fancy equipment. When you're physically fit, you have the strength, flexibility, and endurance needed for your daily activities. **Being physically active helps you feel better physically and mentally.**

What you can learn from this brochure:

- the benefits of physical activity
- how to plan a fitness routine that suits your preferences and your schedule
- how to get started and stay motivated

Physical activity can lower your blood glucose (sugar), blood pressure, and cholesterol. It also reduces your risk for heart disease and stroke, relieves stress, and strengthens your heart, muscles, and bones. In addition, regular activity helps insulin work better, improves your blood circulation, and keeps your joints flexible. If you're trying to lose weight, a combination of physical activity and wise food choices can help you reach your target weight and maintain it. All of these benefits can be yours even if you haven't been very active before.

What kinds of physical activity should be part of my routine?

A comprehensive physical activity routine includes three kinds of activities:

- aerobic exercise
- strength training
- flexibility exercises

Real-Life Stories from People with Diabetes

These people with diabetes all decided to add physical activity to their daily routine. Here's why:

Darlene S.: My little girl wanted me to walk with her to the playground. When I told her I couldn't walk that far, she said we should start walking a little each day so I'll be healthy and live a long time.

Charlie M.: After my heart attack, I started walking almost every day but I didn't keep it up. I remember how great I felt—I had lots of energy. I'd like to get back into that routine so I can feel that great again.

Rosita S.: The day I couldn't fit into my size 14 pants, I said to myself, "That's it! It's time for me to lose weight."

Sadie E.: I want to set a good example for my grandson so he won't get diabetes. He's only 9 but he's already heavy and the kids make fun of him. Maybe we can go for walks together.

How about you? Do you have a reason to become more active? Write it here:

Aerobic exercise

Aerobic exercise increases your heart rate, works your muscles, and raises your breathing rate. For most people, it's best to aim for a total of about 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week. If you haven't been very active recently, you can start out with 5 or 10 minutes a day and work up to more time each week. Or split up your activity for the day—try a brisk 10-minute walk after each meal. If you're trying to lose weight, you may want to exercise more than 30 minutes a day.

Here are some examples of aerobic exercise. Check the ones you'd like to try:

- taking a brisk walk (outside or inside on a treadmill)
- dancing
- taking a low-impact aerobics class

- swimming or doing water aerobic exercises
- taking a bicycle ride outdoors or using a stationary bicycle indoors
- ice-skating or roller-skating
- playing tennis
- running

What are some other ways you could get aerobic exercise?

Strength training

Strength training, done 2 to 3 times a week, helps build strong bones and muscles and makes everyday chores like carrying groceries easier for you. Strength training can also help to prevent weight gain. Here are some ways to do it:

- Lift light weights at home.
- Join a class to do strength training with weights, elastic bands, or plastic tubes.

What are some ways you could do strength training?

Flexibility exercises

Flexibility exercises, also called stretching, help keep your joints flexible. Gentle stretching for 5 to 10 minutes makes aerobic activities such as walking or swimming more comfortable. Your health care team can provide information on how to stretch.

What are some ways you could do flexibility exercises?

Being active throughout the day

In addition to formal exercise, there are many opportunities to be active throughout the day. Being active helps burn calories. The more you move around, the more energy you'll have. These strategies can help you increase your activity level:

- Walk instead of drive whenever possible.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.

- Work in the garden, rake leaves, or do some housecleaning every day.

- Park at the far end of the shopping center lot and walk to the store.

What are some other ways you could be active during the day?

What should I do to get started on a physical activity routine?

These steps will help you get ready for a routine that's safe and enjoyable.

- **Find out which activities will be safe for you.** Talk to your health care team about which activities will be safe for you depending on the condition of your heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys, feet, and nervous system. They may recommend that you have an exercise stress test to see how your heart reacts to exercise. If the tests show signs of disease, ask what physical activities will help you without making your conditions worse.
- **Choose what you'll do and make detailed plans.** Think about what activities are realistic for you and choose the ones you think you can do. Start slowly. Your activity should be somewhat challenging but not overly difficult. Write down exactly what you'll do, where and when you'll do it, how often, and for how long. Plan how you'll reward yourself for your efforts. For example, some people treat themselves to a movie when they meet their goal for the week.

Ask the Diabetes Advisor

Question: I know that regular physical activity would help me take better care of my diabetes and prevent heart disease. But I really don't have time to go to a fitness center. I put in a lot of overtime at the store and then, once I get home, I want to spend time with my wife and the kids or just relax. How can I fit in exercise? What's the minimum time I need to spend to get the benefits?

Jim J., age 49 • type 2 diabetes

Answer: You'll get major benefits from 30 minutes a day of physical activity most days of the week. If you're pressed for time, think about ways to accumulate your half-hour in 10-minute bursts. For example, take an activity break mid-afternoon and go for a short walk. When you have more time on the weekends, choose an activity the whole family can enjoy—play ball or take a hike.

How do I get past the barriers to being physically active?

If you're not active, it's likely that you have at least one reason why. Perhaps you've never been very active. Maybe you're afraid your blood glucose will go too low. Think about what's keeping you from being active and then look into ways to overcome the barriers.

Barriers

Solutions

<input type="checkbox"/> I've never been active.	Don't discount your everyday activities. You may do more than you realize, such as housekeeping or mowing the lawn. Remember—being active is more than “exercise.”
<input type="checkbox"/> I don't have time to exercise for 30 minutes a day.	Do as much as you can. Every step counts. If you're just starting out, start with 10 minutes a day and add more little by little. Work up to 10 minutes at a time, three times a day.
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm too tired after work.	Plan to do something active before work or during the day.
<input type="checkbox"/> I don't have the right clothes.	Wear anything that's comfortable as long as you have shoes that fit well and socks that don't irritate your skin.
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm too shy to exercise in a group.	Choose an activity you can do on your own, such as following along with an aerobics class on TV or going for a walk.
<input type="checkbox"/> I don't want to have sore muscles.	Exercise shouldn't hurt if you go slowly at first. Choose something you can do without getting sore. Learn how to warm up and stretch before you do something active and how to cool down afterward.
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm afraid I'll get low blood glucose.	If you're taking a medication that could cause low blood glucose, talk to your health care provider about ways to exercise safely.
<input type="checkbox"/> Walking hurts my knees.	Try chair exercises or swimming.
<input type="checkbox"/> It's too hot outside.	If it's too hot, too cold, or too humid, walk inside a school or a shopping center.
<input type="checkbox"/> It's not safe to walk in my neighborhood.	Find an indoor activity, such as an exercise class at a community center.
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm afraid I'll make my condition worse.	Get a checkup before planning your fitness routine. Learn what's safe for you to do.
<input type="checkbox"/> I can't afford to join a fitness center or buy equipment.	Do something that doesn't require fancy equipment, such as walking or using cans of food for weights.
<input type="checkbox"/> Exercise is boring.	Find something you enjoy doing. Try different activities on different days. Try exercising with a friend.

What are your barriers?

What are some possible solutions?

Be flexible with your plan so you don't get discouraged. For example, you could plan to get off the bus one stop earlier, most days of the week. Don't be too hard on yourself if you can't. For example, if it's raining, you may not want to walk outside. On those days, choose a different activity. It's more important to reach your long-term goal than to follow the plan from day to day.

- **Learn your blood glucose response to exercise.** Everyone's blood glucose response to exercise is different. Checking your blood glucose before and after exercise can show you the benefits of activity. You also can use the results of your blood glucose checks to prevent low blood glucose or high blood glucose.

If your blood glucose is high before you exercise (above 300 mg/dl), physical activity can make it go even higher, so be cautious about doing something active. For those with type 1 diabetes, if your fasting glucose level is above 250 mg/dl and you have ketones in your urine, it's best to avoid physical activity.

- **Learn how to avoid low blood glucose or hypoglycemia.** Keep in mind that low blood glucose can occur during or long after physical activity. Low blood glucose is most likely if you:
 - take insulin or certain diabetes pills
 - skip a meal
 - exercise for longer than usual
 - exercise strenuously

If low blood glucose is interfering with your exercise routine, eating a snack before you exercise or adjusting your medication may help. Talk to your health care team about what's right for you.

Treating Low Blood Glucose

During activity, check your blood glucose if you notice symptoms such as hunger, nervousness, shakiness, or sweating. If your blood glucose is 70 mg/dl or below, have 2 to 5 glucose tablets, 1/2 cup (4 ounces) of fruit juice, or 1/2 cup of a regular soft drink to raise your blood glucose. After 15 minutes, check your blood glucose again. If it's still below 70 mg/dl, have another serving and repeat these steps until your blood glucose is at least 70 mg/dl.

- **Plan to have water and snacks handy during activity.** Drink plenty of water before, during, and after activity. If you are at risk for low blood glucose, always carry a source of carbohydrate so you'll be ready to treat low blood glucose.
- **Wear a medical identification bracelet, necklace, or a medical ID tag** to protect yourself in case of emergency.
- **Wear shoes that fit well and socks that do not irritate your feet.** Don't forget to check your feet every day.

- **Decide how you'll keep track of your progress.** You may find it motivating to write down what physical activity you've done each day. For example, you can make a note of what you did and how long you did it. Some people enjoy using a step counter, also called a pedometer, to see how far they've walked. Ask your health care team where to get one.

For More Information

To get more information about diabetes, contact the American Diabetes Association:

- Call 1-800-DIABETES (342-2383). Ask for free copies of Diabetes Advisor, Number 5: *Checking Blood Glucose: What It Can Do for You* and other brochures in the Diabetes Advisor series.
- Ask for a free copy of the "I Have Diabetes" outcomes card, order code 5984-02. It's a wallet-sized card you can use to record your targets and track your progress.
- Go to www.diabetes.org.

My health care professional



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