

Exercise and Physical Activity

Regular exercise offers numerous health benefits. Exercise can help you:

- Relieve tension and stress
- Stimulate the mind
- Improve muscle tone and strength
- Increase energy
- Manage blood pressure
- Increase good cholesterol
- Prevent type2 diabetes
- Improve flexibility
- Control appetite
- Maintain a healthy weight

It can even help you meet new people and provide enjoyment!

Getting Started

Whether you are already a regular exerciser or looking to make exercise a regular part of your life, it's important to develop a plan that's right for you.

- **Get motivated.** Circle the reasons above that motivate you to exercise. Are there others? Write them here: _____
- **Start small.** A good goal to aim for is about 30 minutes of exercise 3-6 days per week. If you are just starting out, 10 minutes just 3 times a week might be a realistic start. It is more important to succeed at an easier goal than to set an ambitious goal that you are less likely to achieve. Develop a plan with small, progressive steps towards your ultimate goal.
- **Consider possible obstacles before you start.** If you think about things that might get in the way of following your plan, you can create solutions for them when they come up. Ask yourself if you have the right equipment, like comfortable walking shoes. Be sure your bicycle tires are well-inflated and that you have the most current list of exercise classes in your community. Do you need an iPod or DVD to entertain you while you work out? Remember to consider your childcare needs and plan ahead for less than ideal conditions, like rainy or hot days. Thinking about these things in advance will allow you to plan for them so they don't get in the way.
- **Get support.** Support can be found in many forms. You may decide to exercise with a friend or choose classes or group programs, so that you have company and someone else counting on you to be there. You can also simply tell others about your exercise goals and ask them to support you. Involving co-workers, by walking at lunch, for example, can help you add exercise into the workday. At home, you can make exercise as a family activity, involving your spouse and encouraging your children to make physical activity a part of their lives early on.
- **Think outside the box.** Exercise does not have to be jogging, swimming, biking or joining a gym. Dancing, gardening, yoga at home, or even housecleaning, count as exercise too. You are more likely to succeed if you enjoy what you are doing.
- **Write your plan down and post it where you can see it.** Write the reason you want to exercise at the top of your plan so you always remember your motivation. Read on to see some ideas for the various kinds of exercise to add to your plan.
- **Forget about appearance.** Many people feel awkward or embarrassed when starting a new exercise program. Don't let extra weight or high expectations about performance get in the way of starting! Be proud of yourself for taking control of your health and your life.

Choosing the right type of exercise

If you have an injury or a chronic health condition, check with your doctor for guidelines about exercising safely.

- **Aerobic exercises** (exercises which get your heart pumping faster) condition your heart, lungs and muscles and also help with weight loss.
- **Outdoor exercise** is particularly good for decreasing feelings of depression and PMS. Remember to protect yourself from the sun and drink lots of water when you exercise outside.
- **Lifting weights** strengthens muscles, increases lean muscle mass (which burns more calories than fat) and can help you look more “toned.” Weight-bearing and “anti-gravity” exercise strengthens bones, helping to prevent osteoporosis. This even includes exercising in a chair.
- **Stretching exercises** like yoga and tai chi can help with balance and chronic pain and are generally very relaxing (although some forms of yoga are aerobic as well).

Remember...

Harder is not necessarily better. If you want to increase your fitness, try exercising for longer periods (up to 60 minutes at a time), rather than working more strenuously. Working harder (walking/biking uphill or faster) could tire you and keep you from maintaining your momentum.

Your Warm-up and Cool Down are essential pieces of your workout. The first 5 minutes of exercise involves doing the activity at a slow pace to allow your muscles to warm up. End your exercise with a cool down, again, doing the activity very slowly for the last 5 minutes, or stretching.

Using a plan like the one below before you start or modify your exercise program can help you successfully reach your fitness goals.

Decide what type of exercise you are planning to do.

Write down when and how often you are planning to do it.

Think about factors that could get in the way of your success. (obstacles to success)

Write down what action will you take to prevent or deal with the obstacles above.

Ask someone to support you in your plan. Who will be your support person?

Rate your confidence that you will succeed in changing your habits on a scale from 1-10, with 10 being the highest confidence in success.

Low High

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If you scored your confidence as less than 8, go back to your plan and make it easier.

This tip sheet is provided by Hill Physicians Medical Group for informational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or care given by your physician. Talk to your doctor if you are experiencing symptoms or have questions or concerns.