



## Physical Activity Guidelines

*By Amy Winterfeld*

*Regular physical activity promotes good health.*

Regular physical activity promotes good health. Whatever their age or abilities, being physically active is one of the most important steps Americans can take to improve their well being. Physical activity decreases the risk of many chronic diseases—including heart disease, stroke, colorectal and breast cancers, and type 2 diabetes—and can help maintain healthy weight or reduce weight. On average, direct annual medical costs for people over age 15 who are physically active are \$1,019, while the costs for physically inactive people average \$1,349 annually, a difference paid in part by states through Medicaid and state employee benefits.

*Physical activity improves quality of life.*

A recent study that assessed community-based physical activity interventions found they were cost-effective, reduced new cases of many chronic diseases, and improved quality of life. New cases of disease per 100,000 people were reduced by five to 15 cases for colon cancer, 15 to 58 cases for breast cancer, 59 to 207 cases for type 2 diabetes, and 140 to 476 cases for heart disease.

**Federal Action** In October 2008, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued its first set of *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*. The *Guidelines*, developed by experts in exercise science and public health, review research findings about the benefits of physical activity and recommend activity levels.

*Federal guidelines recommend activity levels.*

Recommendations from <i>Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans</i>			
Population Group	Key Guidelines—Aerobic Activity	Other Activity Guidelines	Comments
Children and Adolescents	60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous activity.	Include muscle and bone strengthening three days per week.	Activities should be age-appropriate, enjoyable, varied.
Adults	150 minutes per week of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity.	Include muscle strengthening two days per week; spread activity over week.	For additional health benefits, increase to 300 moderate activity minutes weekly.
Older Adults	150 minutes per week or as physically active as abilities and conditions allow.	Include exercise to improve balance if at risk of falling.	Additional benefits are better cognitive functioning, increased bone density, lower risk of hip fracture.
Adults with Disabilities	As able, 150 minutes per week of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity.	As able, include muscle strengthening two days per week.	Avoid inactivity. Consult health care provider about appropriate amount and type of activity.
Pregnant Women	150 minutes per week of moderate activity if not already active, preferably spread activity over week.	If already habitually engaged in vigorous physical activity, can continue as advised by health care provider.	Also applies for postpartum period.
People with Chronic Conditions	Consult health-care provider for appropriate types and amounts.	Follow provider recommendations to obtain important health benefits.	Understand how chronic conditions affect safety of physical activity.

Unfortunately, many Americans are not as physically active as the new *Guidelines* recommend. Only 64.5 percent of U.S. adults met the *Guidelines* recommendations for physical activity in 2007. Of those over age 65, only 51 percent were physically active, and even among 18- to 24-year-olds, only 74 percent were physically active. Using the *Healthy People 2010* objectives established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as goals for improving Americans' health, more than half of U.S. adults do not get enough exercise—24 percent are not active at all in their leisure time. To respond to this need, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention funds programs in 28 states designed to prevent obesity and promote healthy lifestyle habits such as physical activity.

*Many Americans do not get enough exercise.*

**State Action** Many strategies and policy options are open to state legislators to reduce barriers to physical activity and increase their constituents' ability to be physically active. Legislative actions taken in 2007 and 2008 included the following.

*States can encourage more physical activity.*

- Providing legislative support for public awareness campaigns, such as California's 2007 Fitness Month for all citizens and Physical Education and Sports Week and Month for school children.
- Establishing or enhancing quality physical education for school children with specific time requirements, recently done in Florida, Mississippi and Oregon. Maryland included children with disabilities in physical education, and New Mexico appropriated \$8 million to phase in physical education in elementary school.
- Supporting recess during the school day, such as Arkansas' resolution urging twice-daily elementary school recess of at least 10 minutes.
- Supporting land use and transportation policies that encourage mixed use development to facilitate walking and biking from home to school, work, shopping and parks.
- Funding development of walking and biking trails—for example, in transportation appropriations.
- Encouraging walk-to-school initiatives, such as state transportation department use of federal funds for Safe Routes to School programs.
- Establishing wellness programs for state employees that facilitate or provide incentives for participation in physical activity.

Regular physical activity can positively affect health throughout a person's lifespan. It also can reduce the incidence and cost of chronic disease for the U.S. population.

## Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Prevalence of physical activity—United States, 2001 and 2005." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 56 (2007): 1209-1212.

Roux, Larissa, et al. "Cost Effectiveness of Community-Based Physical Activity Intervention." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (November 2008).

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*. Hyattsville, Md.: USDHHS, 2008; [www.health.gov/paguidelines](http://www.health.gov/paguidelines).

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