



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (BASIC MOVEMENT, EXERCISE AND FITNESS)

OVERVIEW

Physical activity is any movement of the body that requires the spending (or “burning”) of energy, measured in kilocalories (kcal). Physical activity strengthens the heart and lungs, and maintaining a physically active lifestyle can lower the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and certain types of cancer.¹ While all physical activity uses energy, the intensity of an activity must reach a certain level in order to realize what is considered beneficial to one’s health. These include “moderate” activities burning 3.5–7 kcal per minute, or “vigorous” activities burning greater than 7 kcal per minute.²

Physical activity can take place at varying levels of intensity ranging from basic movement to exercise. The term exercise refers to planned, structured, and repetitive physical activity, typically performed as a way to improve, maintain, or reach a certain level of fitness. Fitness is the measurement of both health- and skill-based traits that include agility, balance, body composition, coordination, endurance, flexibility, power, speed, and reaction time.³ While one can be physically active without being considered “fit,” higher levels of fitness commonly correspond with greater health benefits. Still, physical activity can not only benefit the body but also directly impact mental health, as hormones released during exercise can improve one’s mood and reduce stress.¹

Similar to diet, a proper exercise plan should match one’s lifestyle, as it can be easier to maintain in the long-term. A combination of aerobic activity, strength training, and stretching can provide variety, and contributes to cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, and flexibility. Before choosing an exercise plan, it is important to consider that the recommendations for daily physical activity vary depending upon age, gender, medical conditions, and other personal limitations.⁴

RESOURCES

¹ <https://medlineplus.gov/exerciseandphysicalfitness.html>

² http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/pdf/PA_Intensity_table_2_1.pdf

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1424733/pdf/pubhealthrep00100-0016.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/phys>

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information, tools, and resources about physical activity, visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/>

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/physical-activity-what-is>

<https://health.gov/paguidelines/pdf/adultguide.pdf>

<https://healthfinder.gov/HealthTopics/Category/health-conditions-and-diseases/diabetes/get-active>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/fitness/art-20048269>

<https://medlineplus.gov/exerciseforchildren.html>

<https://medlineplus.gov/exerciseforseniors.html>

<http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/guide/health-fitness-fact-vs-fiction>