



# Fact Sheet

2005

## Student Health Services Texas A&M University

### Physical Fitness

One of the best things you can do for your health is to move your body! It costs nothing and the benefits are great. Regular physical activity can improve your health, looks, and mood.

#### Reasons to be physically active:

- Helps protect against heart disease, cancer and diabetes
- Lowers blood pressure
- Helps you handle stress
- Builds stronger muscles and bones
- Gives more energy and flexibility
- Helps control weight
- Raises self-esteem
- Gives you better posture and helps with back problems
- Bolsters enthusiasm and optimism
- Can help you release tension, relax and sleep

#### Three basic types of physical activity

1. **Flexibility** – activities that help you move, bend, stretch and twist your muscles easily. Examples: yoga and static stretching.
2. **Strength and Endurance** – activities that help you build muscle. Examples: push-ups, sit-ups, and weight lifting.
3. **Aerobic** – activities that make your heart and lungs strong. To benefit from aerobic activities, try to do at least 30 minutes most days of the week. Examples: fast walking, jogging, riding a bike, and swimming.

It is recommended that adults aim to accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily. If you already get 30 minutes of physical activity daily, you can gain even more health benefits by increasing the amount of time that you are physically active or by taking part in more vigorous activities. No matter what activity you choose, you can do it all at once, or spread it out over two or three times during the day.

#### Consider this...

- Your exercise program should be FUN and not exhausting.
- Choose activities that you enjoy and that you can do regularly.

#### When choosing activities, consider...

- your health and physical capabilities
- your interests
- your skills
- equipment and facilities needed

- seasonal variations
- scheduling
- activities that promote endurance, strength and flexibility
- ability to include family or friends if you desire

### **Getting Started...**

1. If you've been inactive, begin easily. After getting used to a level of activity, increase the duration (or both) of your exercise.
2. Check with your doctor if you feel discomfort in your chest, neck, arms or surrounding areas. Do not wait for severe pain before getting a heart check-up.
3. An exercise sessions should begin with a **warm-up** period to increase your breathing, blood flow and body temperature. Warming up will help reduce your risk of injury during the more vigorous activities. The warm-up should last 3-5 minutes, or longer. Follow it with gentle stretching.
4. Next, begin the **conditioning** period. This is the phase of activity that increases cardiovascular fitness. Exercise at a moderate—not exhaustive—intensity. Do not push yourself to the point of collapse. If you've had a recent illness or feel tired, don't work as hard or as long.
5. Regular exercise will help you increase the intensity and length of activity gradually, without becoming totally spent. Extend the conditioning period until you're exercising 30-60 minutes. Enjoy your activity and make it FUN!
6. During the **conditioning** period, you'll breathe faster and more deeply and your heart will beat faster. This is a signal that you are challenging your system. But, do not exercise to the point of being totally out of breath. You should be able to carry on a conversation easily during the conditioning period. Also, you should recover within a few minutes after exercising and not feel totally exhausted for the rest of the day.
7. After exercising, **cool down** for a few minutes. Let your body slowly readjust to the decreased physical demands. Do not stand still or lie down right after exercising. Walk around for a few minutes. Take time to stretch any muscles that feel tight or tense.

### **Keep it Up!**

Don't stop! An active lifestyle is not something to do for a few day, weeks or months and then forget. Make physical activity a lifetime habit.

If you find it hard to stick to your program, ask yourself these questions:

- Am I doing activities I really enjoy?
- Did I seek out friends and family members who can support my efforts?

If you stop exercising, the beneficial effects are lost rapidly. Maintaining good cardiovascular fitness is an ongoing process.

Physical activity will improve the quality of your life! So let's GET PHYSICAL!

Sources:

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