



Physical Activity, Exercise, and Health

Physical activity refers to any bodily movement produced by the contraction of skeletal muscle that increases energy expenditure above a basal level. In the Guidelines, physical activity generally refers to the subset of physical activity that enhances health. Exercise is a form of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and performed with the goal of improving health or fitness. Although all exercise is physical activity, not all physical activity is exercise.

Health is a human condition with physical, social, and psychological dimensions, each characterized on a continuum with positive and negative poles. Positive health is associated with a capacity to enjoy life and to withstand challenges; it is not merely the absence of disease. Negative health is associated with illness, and in the extreme, with premature death.

The Health Benefits of Physical Activity—Major Research Findings

- Regular moderate-to-vigorous physical activity reduces the risk of many adverse health outcomes.
- Some physical activity is better than none.
- For most health outcomes, additional benefits occur as the amount of physical activity increases through higher intensity, greater frequency, and/or longer duration.
- Substantial health benefits for adults occur with 150 to 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. Additional benefits occur with more physical activity.
- Both aerobic and muscle-strengthening physical activity are beneficial.
- Health benefits occur for children and adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, older adults, and those in every studied racial and ethnic group.
- The health benefits of physical activity occur for people with chronic conditions or disabilities.
- The benefits of physical activity generally outweigh the risk of adverse outcomes or injury.