

Physical Exercise Guidelines

Two leading health groups issued new guidelines on physical activity, updating recommendations issued in 1995. The report recommends adults should engage in moderately intense exercise for at least 30 minutes five days a week, or vigorous exercise at least 20 minutes three days each week to reduce health problems linked to physical inactivity.

The guidelines from the American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend weight lifting and vigorous aerobic exercise while also being more specific on how many days a week people should work out. The advice comes amid rising health problems stemming from sedentary lifestyles and obesity among Americans.

The 1995 recommendations, issued by the American College of Sports Medicine with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, had stated, "Every U.S. adult should accumulate 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week."

The new guidelines call for healthy adults to engage in moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity for at least 30 minutes five days each week, or vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise for at least 20 minutes three days a week. The guidelines also state that exercise above the recommended minimum amounts provides even greater health benefits.

Moderate-intensity aerobic activity can be a brisk walk, light jogging or other exercise that noticeably accelerates the heart rate. Vigorous-intensity exercise like jogging causes rapid breathing and a substantial increase in heart rate.

The guidelines called for weightlifting exercise to work on muscular strength and endurance, with eight to 10 different exercises on two nonconsecutive days a week.

The new guidelines offered specific advice for people 65 and older, urging them to consider lifting weights, improving their strength to prevent falls, and working on flexibility exercises and balance training.

Just Beginning?

Increased physical activity can be accomplished in a variety of ways. The American Heart Association offers solutions for individuals considering a more active lifestyle.

Ask your doctor. Depending on your age or medical condition you should stay within your physician's recommendations to develop an appropriate exercise plan.

Physical activity strengthens the heart and improves cardiovascular health. Ailments linked to physical inactivity include cardiovascular disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, colon cancer and breast cancer.