

## Be Active, Healthy, and Happy

By Gretchen M. Ashton, CFT, NBFEE

For the first time since the landmark 1996 U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has published an update. **The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans** provides science-based recommendations to help Americans aged 6 and older improve their health with physical activity. The publication finds health benefits of physical activity far outweigh the possibility of adverse outcomes. Health benefits occur for children and adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, older adults, those in every studied racial and ethnic group, and for people with disabilities.

**Regular physical activity** reduces the risk of many adverse health outcomes. Some physical activity is better than none. Additional benefits occur as the amount of physical activity increases through higher intensity, greater frequency, and/or longer duration. Most **health benefits** occur with at least, 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) of activity such as brisk walking. Additional benefits occur with more physical activity. Both **aerobic** (endurance) and **muscle strengthening** (resistance) activities are beneficial.

Using a **lifespan approach** to physical activity, **key guidelines for children and adolescents** begin with 60-minutes (1-hour) or more of moderate-intensity physical activity every day. More specifically, vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise combined with muscle strengthening and bone strengthening exercise is recommended at least three days of the week.

**Adults** should do at least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity physical activity, or 75-minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. **Aerobic** activity should be performed in episodes of at least 10-minutes and be spread throughout the week. More health benefits may be achieved by increasing aerobic activity to 300 minutes (5 hours) a week of moderate-intensity exercise. **Muscle-strengthening** activities at least two days a week at moderate- to high-intensity and involving all major muscle groups is recommended and provides additional health benefits.

When **older adults** are not able to do 150-minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week because of chronic conditions, they should be as physically active as much as their abilities and conditions allow. Exercise should also focus on maintaining balance and preventing falls.

The guidelines continue with suggestions for **women during pregnancy** and the postpartum period, **adults with disabilities**, and individuals with **chronic medical conditions**. A "Roadmap" is provided for reading select chapters of interest.

Four classification levels of activity, how to measure intensity, training principles, lifestyle exercise, and tools to get started and track your progress, are included in the full report found online at [www.health.gov/paguidelines](http://www.health.gov/paguidelines).

These recommendations are in agreement with the CDC, American Heart Association and American College of Sports Medicine, but are generally less specific. Remember if have been inactive, have a medical condition or disability, or are over the age of 35, consult a physician for a complete medical evaluation before beginning an exercise program.

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