

# Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

## Don't Deprive Yourself ... ... of the Rewards of Exercise



### Individuals who exercise regularly are less likely to develop:

- heart disease
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol levels
- certain forms of cancer
- osteoporosis

### Individuals who exercise regularly are more likely to:

- maintain a healthy body weight
- effectively control the pain and joint swelling that accompanies arthritis
- maintain lean muscle, which is often lost with increasing age
- have higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence
- continue to perform activities of daily living as they grow older
- experience overall feelings of well-being and good health

### TALKING TO COMMITTED EXERCISERS

about the benefits of physical activity is like introducing a dedicated shopper to the joys of a Nordstroms' anniversary sale. After all, those who exercise are no strangers to the freedom elicited by movement, to the sense of accomplishment felt at the end of a long walk or a strength workout. Those uninitiated in the pleasurable rewards of regular physical activity, however, remain skeptical. After all, how can something as basic as exercise not only improve one's life today, but perhaps even save one's life tomorrow?

### Why Should You Exercise?

Researchers have sought to answer this question for years. In 1996, the first Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity was released, detailing the research behind the benefits associated with exercise. This report goes beyond the anecdotal "it-just-feels-good" reason for exercising. What follows are the conclusions of years of research on the health benefits of physical activity.

### Who is Exercise Good for?

While not all types of exercise are appropriate for everyone, everyone can benefit from some type of exercise. After all, exercise is not limited to running or aerobics. You can try water workouts or seated-chair classes. You can play softball or squash, go in-line skating or even take a turn or two around the mall, provided you don't spend all your time lingering in front of shop windows. And if you think activities such as ballroom dancing or tending the garden don't qualify as exercise, think again. The primary factor in choosing an activity should be whether or not you enjoy it. Of course, an okay from your doctor also is advisable, particularly for individuals over 40, or those with special medical conditions or risk factors for heart disease.

### How Much Exercise Does it Take?

How much one exercises is an individual decision, but numerous research studies indicate that hours of intense exercise are not necessary to reap the benefits detailed in the box to the left. In fact, health specialists now recommend that most adults accumulate 30 minutes or more of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. By moderate activity we mean any activity that raises your heart rate and gets the blood pumping without leaving you out of breath or exhausted. So, rather than blocking off a large portion of one's day, 10 minutes of walking at lunch and another 20 minutes after dinner, for example, is all it takes. For those who are so inclined, exercising at slightly higher intensities for longer periods of time can bring about even greater health benefits.

Less important than the intensity or duration of each exercise session is making the commitment to do some type of physical activity, whether you focus on aerobic, strength or flexibility training, every day. Soon, the exhilaration of movement, the empowerment that comes with greater fitness and health — these things will have you hooked on exercise. It won't happen overnight, and there may be some aspects you find less enjoyable (some people just can't get over the sweating part of it), but the sense of feeling better, of feeling healthier, will overpower any negative attitudes toward exercise you may still be harboring. Don't worry. These, too, will pass. So, isn't it about time you got started?

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