

Guidelines Address Physical Activity for Individuals 6 Years and Older

October 9, 2008 — The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has issued guidelines regarding the types and amounts of physical activity that provide substantial health benefits for physical activity for individuals 6 years and older. These *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* are posted online at the HHS Web site. Although primarily targeting policymakers and health professionals, the information in these guidelines may also be useful to interested members of the lay public.

"Along with President Bush, I believe that physical activity should be an essential component of any comprehensive disease prevention and health promotion strategy for Americans," HHS Secretary Michael O. Leavitt writes in a letter introducing the guidelines. "We know that sedentary behavior contributes to a host of chronic diseases, and regular physical activity is an important component of an overall healthy lifestyle. There is strong evidence that physically active people have better health-related physical fitness and are at lower risk of developing many disabling medical conditions than inactive people."

Regular physical activity each week, sustained for months and years, can produce long-term health benefits. Strong evidence links regular physical activity with a lower risk for early death, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, metabolic syndrome, colon and breast cancers, and depression. Regular physical activity also promotes prevention of weight gain, weight loss when combined with diet, better cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, fall prevention, and better cognitive function in older adults.

The *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines* were designed to complement the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, which were developed by HHS and the US Department of Agriculture. When used together, these guidelines may help promote good health and reduce the risk for chronic diseases by emphasizing the importance of being physically active and eating a healthy diet.

When writing the guidelines, HHS primarily used a report from an appointed external scientific advisory committee (the Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee) as well as comments from the public and government agencies.

Major research findings on the health benefits of physical activity, gathered by the Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee after a review of the literature and other available evidence, are as follows:

- Regular physical activity lowers the risk for many adverse health outcomes.
- Although some physical activity is better than none, higher intensity, greater frequency, and/or longer duration of physical activity provide additional benefits for most health outcomes.
- At least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, is needed for most health benefits, but more physical activity provides additional benefits.
- Aerobic (endurance) and muscle-strengthening (resistance) physical activity both promote better health.
- In every studied racial and ethnic group, and in children and adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, and older adults, physical activity is linked to health benefits.
- People with disabilities also receive health benefits from physical activity.
- The benefits provided by physical activity far outweigh the risk for harms.

Key guidelines for physical activity for children and adolescents are as follows:

- Children and adolescents should engage in at least 1 hour of physical activity daily, preferably in physical activities that are appropriate for their age, that are enjoyable, and that offer variety.
- Most of this activity should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity.
- Vigorous-intensity physical activity, muscle-strengthening physical activity, and bone-strengthening physical activity should each be performed at least 3 days per week.

Key guidelines for physical activity for adults, including older adults, are as follows:

- All adults should avoid inactivity. Participation in any amount of physical activity is associated with some health benefits relative to no physical activity.
- At least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity offers substantial health benefits.
- Aerobic activity should preferably be spread throughout the week and performed in episodes of at least 10 minutes.
- Aerobic physical activity of 300 minutes per week of moderate intensity, or 150 minutes per week of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity, is associated with additional and more extensive health benefits.
- Engaging in physical activity beyond this amount provides additional health benefits.
- Muscle-strengthening activities that are moderate or high intensity and involve all major muscle groups should be performed on 2 or more days per week for additional health benefits.

Additional guidelines specific to older adults are as follows:

- When chronic conditions prevent older adults from doing 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow. They should understand whether and how their conditions affect their ability to do regular physical activity safely.
- Older adults at risk of falling should do exercises that maintain or improve balance.
- Older adults should determine their level of effort for physical activity relative to their fitness level.

Adults, children, and adolescents with disabilities should follow the guidelines for their age group if possible, or if not, they should be as physically active as their abilities allow, with guidance from their healthcare provider. They should avoid inactivity.

Healthy pregnant and postpartum women who are not already engaged in vigorous-intensity physical activity should get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week, preferably spread throughout the week. Those who regularly engage in vigorous-intensity aerobic activity or in high amounts of activity can continue with this regimen, provided that their condition remains unchanged and that they consult with their healthcare provider regarding their activity level throughout their pregnancy.

US Dept of Health and Human Services. *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*.

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<http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/default.aspx>

Clinical Context

Regular physical activity each week, sustained for months and years, is linked to long-term health benefits, including reduced risks for early death, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, metabolic syndrome, colon and breast cancers, and depression. Evidence is also strong that regular physical activity is associated with prevention of weight gain, weight loss when combined with diet, better cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, fall prevention, and better cognitive function in older adults.

The HHS designed these *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* to be used together with *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, which were developed by HHS and the US Department of Agriculture. When used together, these recommendations may provide health benefits and lower the risk for chronic diseases by highlighting the importance of being physically active and eating a healthy diet.

Study Highlights

- Health benefits of physical activity are as follows:

- Regular physical activity reduces the risk for many adverse health outcomes.
- Some physical activity is better than none. Greater intensity, higher frequency, and/or longer duration of physical activity offer additional benefits for most health outcomes.
- Moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, at least 150 minutes per week is needed for most health benefits. More physical activity offers additional benefits.
- Aerobic (endurance) and muscle-strengthening (resistance) physical activity both promote better health.
- Physical activity is linked to health benefits in every studied racial and ethnic group; in children and adolescents; in young, middle-aged, and older adults; and in people with disabilities.
- The benefits provided by physical activity far outweigh the risk for harms.
- Key guidelines for physical activity are as follows:
 - Children and adolescents should engage in 1 or more hours of physical activities daily, preferably those that are age appropriate, enjoyable, and that offer variety. Most of this activity should be moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, with vigorous-intensity physical activity, muscle-strengthening physical activity, and bone-strengthening physical activity each to be performed 3 or more days per week.
 - All adults should avoid inactivity; some physical activity is better than none.
 - In adults, at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity, 75 minutes per week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both, offers substantial health benefits.
 - Aerobic activity should preferably be spread throughout the week, in episodes of at least 10 minutes. Additional, more extensive health benefits are offered by 300 or more minutes per week of moderate intensity, 150 minutes per week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both. More of this activity is even better.
 - Moderate- or high-intensity muscle-strengthening activities that involve all major muscle groups should be performed on 2 or more days per week for additional health benefits.
 - Older adults should follow the adult guidelines whenever possible, or they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow, while observing safety precautions.
 - Older adults at risk of falling should do exercises that maintain or improve balance.
 - Adults, children, and adolescents with disabilities should follow guidelines for their age group if possible. If not, they should be as physically active as their abilities allow, with guidance from their healthcare provider.
- Healthy pregnant and postpartum women not already engaged in vigorous-intensity physical activity should get 2.5 or more hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week, preferably spread throughout the week. Those already engaged in such activity can continue their usual activity levels, provided that their condition remains unchanged and that they consult with their healthcare provider.

Pearls for Practice

- The HHS *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* describe the numerous health benefits of regular physical activity in reducing the risk for many adverse health outcomes in every age, racial, and ethnic group studied. Some physical activity is better than none, but greater intensity, higher frequency, and/or longer duration of physical activity offer additional benefits for most health outcomes.
- Key guidelines for physical activity are that children and adolescents should engage in 1 or more hours of physical activities daily, mostly moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, with vigorous-intensity physical activity, muscle-strengthening physical activity, and bone-strengthening physical activity each performed 3 or more days per week. In adults, at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity, 75 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both, offers substantial health benefits.