

GETTING AND STAYING ACTIVE

Guidebook



We know that being physically active is important, but too often it gets pushed to the bottom of our ever-growing priority list. Use this guidebook to learn more about the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, examples of each type of exercise, and ideas for how to get started.

Learn more about the guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services here: health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/physical-activity-guidelines

Note that it is recommended to consult with your doctor before beginning any new exercise activity or program to determine the types and amounts of physical activity that are appropriate for you and your specific needs and fitness level.



Fitness Spotlight: Circuit training

Circuit training is a workout that rotates between several exercises to target different muscle groups with little or no rest in between.

It has been shown to improve muscular endurance and growth, improve heart health, and may promote weight loss².

The basics:

- › Each circuit contains 6 or more exercises
- › Circuits can be:
 - **Time-based:** Do each exercise for a set time (e.g., one minute)
 - **Repetition-based:** Complete each exercise a certain number of times
- › Circuits are repeated 1-3 times

The benefits:

Circuit training can include cardio or strength training, depending on the activities chosen. It can be designed for all fitness levels by varying the exercises, breaks in between, or the number of rounds. It can be a quick and efficient way to get active.

Anatomy of a workout

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans define physical activity with a few key components¹:

- › **Intensity:** How hard a person works to do the activity (e.g., energy required, weight lifted)
- › **Duration:** How long a person does an activity in one session (e.g., minutes, repetitions)
- › **Frequency:** How often a person does the activity (e.g., days/week)

Some workouts combine these elements in unique ways to get maximum benefit out of shorter timeframes. Examples include high-intensity interval training or circuit training. See Fitness Spotlights for more details.

Safety reminders

- › Choose activities that are appropriate for your age, experience, and fitness level
- › Make smart choices in when, how, and where you exercise
- › Use proper protective gear and equipment to reduce the risk of accidents or injuries
- › Don't forget to warm up and cool down to gradually ease your body into and out of exercise
- › Consult with your doctor, especially if you have a chronic condition or symptoms



Strength training

Strength training is exercise that uses weights or resistance to make your muscles work harder than they are accustomed to doing. This in turn helps you build muscle mass. Strength training stimulates bone growth, improves your balance and posture, and can assist with weight management³.

Strength training tips:

- › **Strength training should focus on all major muscle groups:** legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms. Search online or ask a fitness specialist to find exercises that work each muscle group.
- › **Equipment can be effective for strength training.** Many options are available for a low cost and are easy to store when not in use. See examples to the right.
- › **Bodyweight exercises** are also effective, and require no financial investment. See next page for examples.
- › **Start small and increase weight gradually.** Start with bodyweight exercises and add more resistance slowly.
- › **Develop a full-body workout and do the same set of moves each time.** This allows you to master the moves before increasing the difficulty. When you can do 12-15 repetitions (reps) comfortably, increase the weight and/or the number of reps to continue to build strength.
- › **Proper form is critical to give you the best results while avoiding injury.** Consider consulting a personal trainer or fitness specialist who can observe and give instruction before bad habits form. If you are unable to complete a strength exercise with proper form, decrease the weight or number of repetitions to avoid injury.
- › **Don't neglect your rest days.** We only grow stronger as muscle tissue repairs itself. Allow for at least 48 hours between strength-training sessions.

Guidelines recommend¹:

Moderate or greater intensity strength-training exercises **2-3 days per week**.

It is considered **moderate intensity** when the amount of weight or resistance used tires your muscles after 8-12 repetitions.



Optional equipment:

- › Household objects:
 - Soup cans as light weights
 - Laundry detergent bottles as a kettlebell
 - Chair exercises
 - Stairs for building leg strength
 - Wall for push-ups, wall sits
 - Paper plates or towels as gliders
 - Laundry baskets for lifting
 - Door frame for pull-ups
- › Balance trainers
- › Resistance bands
- › Free weights (barbells, dumbbells)
- › Medicine balls
- › Stability balls
- › Kettlebells
- › Weight machines
- › Suspension training straps
- › Gliding discs

Develop a strength-based circuit training workout:

Set 1 exercises:

Shoulders: _____ Time/reps: _____

Abdomen: _____ Time/reps: _____

Hips: _____ Time/reps: _____

Back: _____ Time/reps: _____

Chest: _____ Time/reps: _____

Arms: _____ Time/reps: _____

Repetitions of set: _____ Rest time: _____

Set 2 exercises:

Shoulders: _____ Time/reps: _____

Abdomen: _____ Time/reps: _____

Hips: _____ Time/reps: _____

Back: _____ Time/reps: _____

Chest: _____ Time/reps: _____

Arms: _____ Time/reps: _____

Repetitions of set: _____ Rest time: _____

Bodyweight exercise examples:

It is important to work all the major muscle groups of the body. Bodyweight exercises are a great way to get started and require no equipment. There are many variations of the below exercises you can try as you become stronger. Search online for more options to put together a comprehensive bodyweight strength-training workout.

Shoulders

T-plank: From your hands and knees on the floor, extend your legs behind you and press your toes into the floor or mat. Reach one arm up toward the ceiling, forming a "T" shape with your body. Stack one foot on top of the other. Hold at least 30 seconds, then switch sides. For beginners, place your bottom knee on the floor.



Abdomen

Forearm plank: From your hands and knees on the floor, extend your legs behind you and press your toes into the floor or mat. Bend each elbow and plant your forearms on the floor. Your body should form a straight line from your head to your heels. Hold this position for at least 30 seconds.



Legs

Squat: Stand with your feet between hip- and shoulder-width apart, toes slightly turned out. With a neutral spine, bend your knees to lower down as far as possible in a controlled movement, chest lifted and heels firmly on the ground. Make sure your knees don't go past your toes. Press through your heels back to standing.



Hips

Side lunge: Stand with your feet hip width apart. Take a wide step to the right and lower your body until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Be careful your right knee doesn't push past your toe. Pause and push off with your right foot to return to standing. Repeat on other side.



Back

Bird dog: Start on your hands and knees, hands in line with your shoulders and knees in line with your hips. With a neutral spine, raise your left arm and right leg together at a controlled pace. Hold for a few seconds, then slowly lower back to starting. Repeat 10-15 repetitions on each side.



Chest

Push-up: Assume a plank position with your arms straight underneath your shoulders and feet extended behind you. With hands slightly wider than shoulder-width, bend your elbows and lower your chest until it almost touches the floor or mat. Pause, then push yourself back up to starting. For beginners, keep your knees on the floor.



Arms

Triceps Dip: Sit in front of a sturdy bench, chair, or on the floor with your legs extended or bent in front of you. Position your hands behind you with your fingertips facing your body. Lift your body weight and engage your triceps as you bend your elbows towards a 90-degree angle. Then straighten your arms to return to starting.



Aerobic exercise

Aerobic or cardiovascular exercise requires movement of large muscles in a rhythmic manner for a sustained period of time¹. This movement makes your heart rate and breathing rise as they work to get oxygen to your muscles. Aerobic exercise can help burn body fat, boosts your mood, and reduces the risk of some cancers and chronic conditions, such as heart disease³.



Fitness Spotlight: High-intensity Interval Training (HIIT)

High-intensity interval training (HIIT) is a workout that alternates short bursts of intense exercise with low intensity recovery periods in between exercises. HIIT is typically shorter in duration, but can deliver as just many (if not more) health benefits as longer durations of continuous moderate-intensity exercise⁵.

Note that HIIT may not be appropriate for those who are new to exercise or have an injury or chronic condition.

The basics:

- › There is no set standard for HIIT interval duration or number of reps
- › Each “burst” of activity usually lasts between 30-60 seconds.
- › Each burst of activity counts as one rep. HIIT workouts typically consist of 4-6 reps.
- › Recovery periods should be the same as or longer than your work interval to maintain sufficient intensity
- › Total duration can be 10-30 minutes
- › Limit HIIT workouts to only 2 per week (90 minutes or less) for adequate recovery
- › Example activities include sprinting, biking, jump rope, push-ups, bodyweight exercises

Example: Tabata training is a type of HIIT workout that involves 20 seconds of maximum effort, vigorous-intensity exercise followed by 10 seconds of rest. Each Tabata is 8 sets for a total of 4 minutes per round.

Guidelines recommend¹:

- › **150-300 minutes per week** of moderately intense activity
- › **OR 75-150 minutes per week** of vigorously intense activity
- › Spread throughout the week (at least **3 days**) yields most benefits



Aerobic activity tips:

- › To determine intensity level, use the “talk test”¹:
 - **Moderate intensity:** You are able to talk, but not sing without needing to take a breath
 - **Vigorous intensity:** You are not able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath.
- › **Impact level can vary.** Impact is the level of force on the bones of the body created by impact with the ground. Jumping jacks or jump rope are examples of high impact activity. Low impact activity, such as walking or swimming, is easy on the joints. You can do low impact activity and still achieve vigorous intensity.
- › **Incorporate elements you enjoy into your cardio workouts**, such as a playlist of energizing music, a friend or workout buddy, perhaps a location you enjoy. If you like something about exercising, you’re more likely to keep doing it.
- › **Try mini workouts** of 5-10 minutes throughout the day instead of one long workout. For something more structured, try a short HIIT or circuit training workout throughout the day. Or break up the day by taking a few flights of stairs, a brisk walk, or jog around the block.
- › **Keep it fresh** so you don’t get bored with your chosen workout. Try out a fitness class at the gym, local clubs or sports teams, even virtual reality games can “trick” you into exercising. See next page for examples.
- › **Expand your idea of “active.”** Many of the household chores and activities you do every day “count” as exercise, even if you don’t think of them as a workout!
- › **Be efficient with your workouts by combining strength, cardio, and balance exercises.** Activities like boxing, dancing, or sports like tennis, rowing, even golf (if you skip the golf cart) can help build endurance and strength at the same time. HIIT and circuit training can also incorporate both strength and cardio exercises.

Examples of aerobic activity:

There are hundreds of different ways you can achieve the recommended amount of aerobic exercise! Review the ideas below and mark the ones that you are interested in trying or learning more about. Search online for options near you.

Low impact:

- ☐ Exercise walking
- ☐ Elliptical trainer, step machine
- ☐ Stationary bicycling
- ☐ Swimming, water aerobics
- ☐ Spinning
- ☐ Ballroom dancing
- ☐ Rock climbing
- ☐ Mountain biking
- ☐ Rowing

High impact:

- ☐ Running or jogging
- ☐ Rugby
- ☐ Tennis
- ☐ Skiing
- ☐ Gymnastics
- ☐ Jumping rope
- ☐ Jumping jacks
- ☐ Kickboxing

With your kids:

- ☐ Trampoline
- ☐ Hopscotch
- ☐ Playing tag
- ☐ Playing catch
- ☐ Playground
- ☐ Exercise videos
- ☐ Hula-hooping
- ☐ Dancing
- ☐ Jumping
- ☐ Bike rides
- ☐ Rollerblading
- ☐ Skateboarding
- ☐ Video games/virtual reality

Organized sports

- ☐ Squash
- ☐ Racquetball
- ☐ Tennis



Did you know...

Vacuuming your house for 30 minutes can burn more than 100 calories⁷.

At home:

- ☐ Online videos/fitness apps
- ☐ Brisk cleaning
- ☐ Briskly walk (or jog) the dog
- ☐ Use a push mower
- ☐ Gardening
- ☐ Do lunges or squats during commercial breaks
- ☐ Use stationary bike while watching TV
- ☐ Yard work
- ☐ Wash the car yourself

In the winter:

- ☐ Shovel snow
- ☐ Snowshoeing
- ☐ Cross-country skiing
- ☐ Downhill skiing
- ☐ Indoor fitness classes
- ☐ Ice skating
- ☐ Sledding

In the office:

- ☐ Have “walking meetings”
- ☐ Take the stairs
- ☐ Use the furthest break room
- ☐ Do exercises during meetings
- ☐ Use the furthest bathroom
- ☐ Park far away from the door
- ☐ Walk to speak to coworkers face-to-face instead of email

Did you know...

Just 10 minutes/day of jumping rope has the same cardiovascular benefits as jogging for 30 minutes/day⁶!



Unique workouts:

- ☐ Pole fitness
- ☐ Trapeze/aerial fitness
- ☐ Dance cardio
- ☐ Martial arts
- ☐ Cardio drumming
- ☐ Obstacle course racing
- ☐ Battle ropes
- ☐ Aqua fitness
- ☐ Circus training
- ☐ Golf
- ☐ Triathlon
- ☐ Basketball
- ☐ Volleyball
- ☐ Pickleball
- ☐ Gymnastics
- ☐ Surfing
- ☐ Hockey
- ☐ Softball/baseball
- ☐ Soccer

Stretching exercise

Stretching exercises increase the ability of our joints to move through their full range of motion, or flexibility. Stretching can be used as part of a dynamic warm-up or cool-down before and after your regular workout.

Stretching has been shown to improve blood flow and circulation, and may even reduce stress, pain, and stiffness!⁸

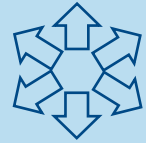
Stretching exercise basics:

- › **Warm up muscles before a workout with dynamic stretches**, the active tightening of muscles and moving your joints through their full range of motion in controlled movements. Here are a few examples:
 - **Torso twist:** Extend your arms out to the side. Twist your torso from one side to the other, keeping your feet in the same position.
 - **Arm circles:** With your feet shoulder-width apart, hold arms out to the side at shoulder height. Circle your arms, starting out small and gradually making them bigger. Reverse the direction of the circles.
 - **Leg swings:** Balance on one foot, holding onto something stationary for balance if needed. Swing the other leg forward and backward 10 times. Repeat with the other leg. You can also do leg swings with a side-to-side movement if you wish.
 - Note that illustrations and more examples can be found here: www.healthline.com/health/exercise-fitness/dynamic-stretching
- › **Use static stretches to cool down.** These involve stretching a muscle as far as it can go without feeling pain and holding that position for 15-30 seconds. Static stretches are safer after your muscles are already warmed up after exercise.
- › **Focus on all major muscle groups**, making sure to stretch on both sides.
- › **Stretching should not be painful or uncomfortable.** Stop the stretch when you feel tension and breathe deeply. Then relax and repeat the stretch, trying to move further into the stretch if it feels comfortable.
- › **Do stretches during other activity**, such as watching TV, standing in line, or even at your desk. Search online for safe, easy options that can be done with no equipment. See Fitness Spotlight for a few desk stretch exercises.

Experts recommend:

Do stretching exercises
2-4 times per week.

If done before or after a workout,
aim for durations of at least
5-10 minutes each time.



Workouts and optional equipment:

- › Yoga
- › Tai chi
- › Pilates
- › Foam rollers
- › Stretch/resistance bands



Fitness Spotlight: Office stretches

These exercises can be done from a seated position in a firm chair. Search online for more!

Neck stretch: Bend your head forward toward your chest. Hold for 15 seconds. Bring your head back up. Hold for 15 seconds then bring your head back up. Repeat with a slight tilt to the left.

Shoulder roll: Sit tall with your feet flat on the floor and spread comfortably apart. Roll your shoulders up, then back, then down, then forward in a smooth circular motion. Then do the same moves going in the opposite direction: up, forward, down, and back.

Side bend: Raise both arms straight over head. Slowly drop your right arm and lean to the right (your left arm curves over your head). Hold for 15 seconds. Gently return to your original position with both arms in the air. Then drop your left arm and lean to left. Hold for 15 seconds.

Leg extension: Lift one leg and stretch it straight out in front of you. Don't lock your knee. Keep other foot flat on the ground. Slowly count to 5, then gently lower your leg. Repeat with the other leg.

Developing a workout plan

A detailed workout plan helps formalize your commitment to exercise. Use the guide below as a template for developing a plan that works for you and your schedule. Be sure to consult your doctor as you consider what types of activities are appropriate for your age, fitness level, and experience with exercise.

1. First, review your weekly schedule to determine days of the week that work best for exercise and rest days. Aim for 5 days of activity and 2 days of rest. Mark your rest days in the template below.
2. Next, consider the time of day that works best for exercise. Fill in the grid below with your regularly scheduled activities (work, break time, making dinner, etc.) to help you locate available time for exercise.
3. Note the type of activity and the specific timeframe in your designated exercise time below. You might consider using different colors to designate aerobic, strength, and stretching exercises. Don't forget to take into consideration household chores and activities you already do that can be considered exercise!
4. Finally, review your regularly scheduled activities and consider how you might “habit stack” with physical activity. Note the type of activity you will do (“lift hand weights”) with its “counterpart” (“weekly team meeting”) below.

Time	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	☐ Rest day	☐ Rest day	☐ Rest day	☐ Rest day	☐ Rest day	☐ Rest day	☐ Rest day
8:00a							
9:00a							
10:00a							
11:00a							
12:00p							
1:00p							
2:00p							
3:00p							
4:00p							
5:00p							
6:00p							
7:00p							
8:00p							
9:00p							
Other:							

Develop the right mindset

While it seems like what we *do* is the most important part of staying active, an equally (if not more) important piece is how we *think* about exercise. We can tap into the power of positive self-talk before, during, and after exercise.

- › **Set intentions before exercise.** Instead of focusing on what you want to do, ask yourself how you want to feel instead. This can help you determine the type of activity most likely to satisfy that intention.

Examples: “Today I want to feel...”

Fit	Resilient	Strong
Powerful	Competitive	Fierce
Confident	Capable	Healthy
Flexible	Energy	Fun
Relaxed	Sweaty	Persistent

- › **Tap into the power of positive self-talk.** Combat negativity that creeps into your workouts with motivational or instructional self-talk. Phrases that are encouraging or that help you focus on the task can boost your self-confidence and enjoyment of the task. Talk to yourself in the second person (using “you” statements). See examples to the right.

Positive affirmation examples

You can do this!

You are doing something good for yourself.

You are not a quitter.

You are improving.

Just one more rep!

You are fierce and confident.

You never know what you can do until you try.

After this you can relax.

Working hard makes me feel strong.

You are capable of reaching your goals.

You can do it, it's only one minute longer!

You're becoming stronger.

You deserve to feel happy and healthy.

You've got a great pace.

This is easier than it was last week.

You are really nailing this workout!

You are fit and resilient.

References:

¹ United States Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) (2018) Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans 2nd Edition. https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf

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⁸ Foley, C. (2018, August 31) *The Boundless Benefits of Stretching*. University Health News. <https://universityhealthnews.com/daily/mobility-fitness/boundless-benefits-of-stretching>

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