ToYourHealth
WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND FOR MOVING AROUND

GET ACTIVE, WHEREVER YOU ARE

You know that physical activity can help you live a longer, healthier life. But did you know you don't need to join a gym or use costly equipment to be physically active? No matter where you live, work, or go to school, you can find ways to move more and sit less throughout your day. In addition to helping your health, you might have fun without spending a lot of money.

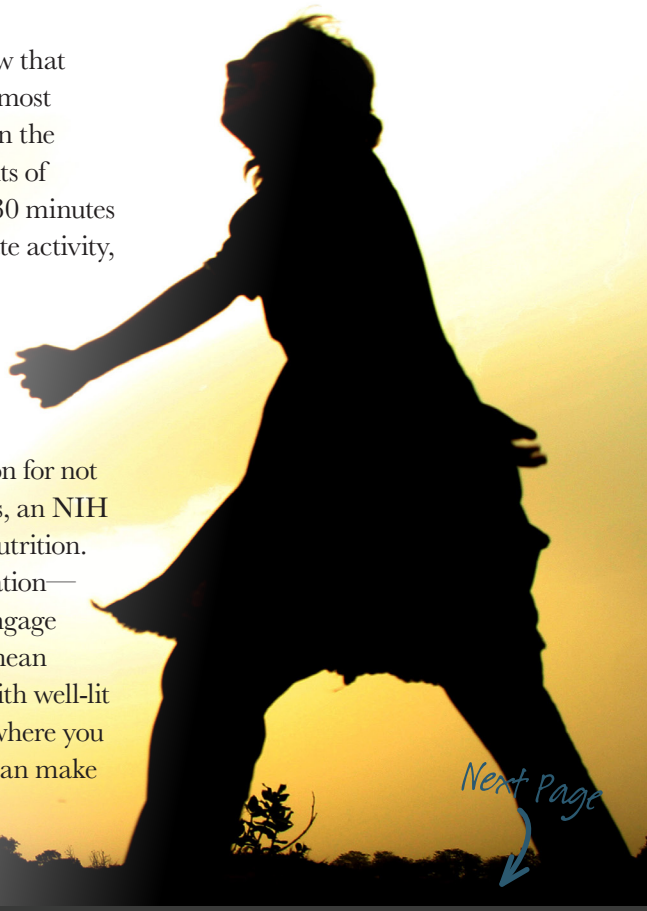
Moving more and sitting less can reduce your risk for many serious conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, and certain kinds of cancer. Some studies suggest that physical activity can have mental benefits as well, helping to relieve depression and maintain thinking abilities as you age. Healthful physical activity includes exercise as well as many everyday activities, such as doing active chores around the house, yard work, or walking the dog.

Activities that cause you to breathe harder are called aerobic activities. These make your heart and blood vessels healthier. Aerobic activities include brisk walking, dancing, swimming, and playing basketball. Strengthening activities, like push-ups and lifting weights, help make your muscles and bones stronger and can also improve your balance.

But even though many of us know that physical activity is a good thing, most adults nationwide don't meet even the minimum recommended amounts of physical activity. (That's at least 30 minutes of brisk walking or other moderate activity, 5 days a week.)

WHY AREN'T WE MORE ACTIVE?

"Lack of time is a common reason for not exercising," says Dr. Mary Evans, an NIH expert on physical activity and nutrition. "Another important factor is location—having safe places to walk and engage in different activities. That can mean having sidewalks, public parks with well-lit walking paths, a shopping mall where you can walk, or other features that can make activity inviting and easy to do."



Next Page

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Continued from previous page

Some communities don't have safe playgrounds or sidewalks, so kids tend to spend their free time indoors. Sitting instead of moving makes it hard to maintain a healthy weight. Many adults sit behind the wheel driving to work and then sit most of the day at a computer, taking few breaks to stand up and move around. In suburban neighborhoods, people often have to drive rather than walk to get to grocery stores, shops, and even public transportation.

Research also shows that taking public transportation—like buses and trains—can help boost activity. In a recent Seattle-area study, researchers found that people tend to add about 15 minutes of activity to their day when they take public transportation, in part by walking to and from the mass transit site instead of taking a car from door to door.

Although your environment can affect how active you are, you can still look for new ways to use the world around you to add some movement to your day.

"If you're at work, try climbing the stairs instead of using the elevator. And get up from your chair and move around at least once an hour," Evans says. Stand up and walk to a colleague's office instead of sending an email. Try standing instead of sitting when you're on the phone, or have "walking" meetings with co-workers instead of sitting in a conference room. And take a brisk walk on your lunch break to get some activity in.

"It's not really necessary to engage in vigorous physical activity like running to have beneficial health effects. Just 30 minutes of brisk walking most days, in at least 10-minute segments, can have a positive effect," Evans says.

GET ACTIVE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- Start a walking group with friends, neighbors, or co-workers.
- Make the streets safer for walking by driving the speed limit and yielding to people who walk.
- Consider joining a low- or no-cost exercise group or an office sports team such as softball or kickball, and enroll kids in community sports teams or lessons.
- Participate in local planning efforts to develop walking paths, sidewalks, and bike paths.
- Work with parents and schools to encourage kids to safely walk or ride bikes to school.
- Join other parents to ask for more physical activity at school.
- Try different activities to find the ones you really enjoy, and have fun while being active!