



# Why Should I Be Physically Active?

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If your doctor has suggested that you begin a physical activity program, follow that advice. People who don't get enough physical activity are much more likely to develop health problems.

Regular, moderate-intensity physical activity can lower your risk of

- Heart disease and heart attack
- High blood pressure
- High total cholesterol, high LDL (bad) cholesterol and low HDL (good) cholesterol
- Overweight or obesity
- Diabetes
- Stroke



If you haven't been active and want to start exercising, first check with your doctor for a program that's right for you. Once you start, you'll find that exercise isn't just good for your health — it's also fun!

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## What else can physical activity do for me?

Physical activity also offers these benefits:

- Strengthens your heart, lungs, bones and muscles.
- Gives you more energy and strength.
- Helps control your weight and blood pressure.
- Helps you handle stress.
- Helps you sleep better.
- Helps you feel better about how you look.
- Helps you feel upbeat.

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## What kind of activities should I do?

You don't have to be an athlete to lower your risk of heart disease and stroke! If done on most or all days, you can benefit from moderate activities like these:

- Pleasure walking
- Gardening and yard work
- Moderate to heavy housework
- Pleasure dancing and home exercise

More vigorous physical activity can further improve the fitness of your heart and lungs. Start

slowly, and build up as your heart gets stronger. First, discuss exercise with your doctor or nurse. Then try one or more of these:

- Brisk walking, hiking or jogging
- Stair climbing
- Bicycling, swimming or rowing
- Aerobic dancing or cross-country skiing

## How often should I be physically active?

- Work up to 30 to 60 minutes of daily activity.
- Make sure it's regular — most or all days of the week.

## What else can I do?

Look for ways to add more physical activity to your daily routines. Making small changes in your lifestyle can make a big difference in your overall health. Here are some examples:

- Take a walk for 10 or 15 minutes during your lunch break.
- Take stairs instead of escalators and elevators.
- Park farther from the store and walk through the parking lot.

## How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease.
3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

## What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

### Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- **Chest discomfort**
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body**
- **Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort**
- **Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness**

### Warning Signs of Stroke

- **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
- **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
- **Sudden, severe headache with no known cause**

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 ... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

What's the best type of physical activity for me?

How much physical activity do I need?

Your contribution to the American Heart Association supports research that helps make publications like this possible.

The statistics in this sheet were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update* at [americanheart.org/statistics](http://americanheart.org/statistics).

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