

## Encouraging Physical Activity for Health

Physical activity is one of the most important things you can do to help improve your overall health and exercise has many benefits which include:

- Weight loss
- Improved sleep
- Mood and stress management
- Improves brain health by:
  - Increasing focus
  - Helps long term memory
  - Sharpens short term memory
- Lowers blood sugar
- Reduces the risk of:
  - Heart Disease
  - High Blood Pressure
  - High Cholesterol
  - Diabetes
- And most important improves the overall quality of life!

The "Annals of Internal Medicine" completed a study which showed that prolonged sitting and inactivity are associated with increased incidents of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes. Too much sitting also decreases circulation and increases the mortality rate.

There are many reasons or barriers why people haven't started a routine exercise program. Look at the following list and see if your excuse is included:

- I don't have the time to exercise  
Response: You can work exercise easily into your everyday life
- I've never been active in my life  
Response: There is no time like the present
- I'm too tired to exercise  
Response: Surprisingly exercises gives you more energy
- I'm too shy to exercise in a group  
Response: You can exercise by yourself or with a close friend
- Walking makes my knees hurt  
Response: There are many ways to exercise, including swimming and chair exercises
- It's not safe to walk in my area  
Response: You can walk in indoor malls which have added security
- I can't afford to join a fitness center or buy fancy equipment  
Response: There are exercise programs that use items you have around your home or you may have benefits for gym usage

Now that you realize that all the above reasons are just excuses and if you're ready to start getting active, it is time to set a goal and make a plan. Setting a goal and referring to it daily will help keep you on track. Also determine why you are exercising, such as weight loss or overall health improvement, and use this as your motivation to keep going. It's easy to start an

exercise routine once you've decided it's time for a change, it's keeping it up that is a challenge for most people.

While everyone's goals for activity and exercise are different some general guidelines are:

- For overall health – 30 minutes most days of the week
- For weight loss – 60-90 minutes most days of the week
- For maintenance of weight loss – 60 minutes most days of the week

There are different kinds of exercise to consider depending on your activity level and medical needs:

1. Flexibility Exercises – Stretching exercises helps keep your joints limber and lowers your chances of getting hurt. It will help to stretch for 5-10 minutes to help your body warm up and get ready for activities. It is also useful for cool down after exercise.
  - Fit Hint: Chair exercise during television commercial breaks. Each commercial is about 1-3 minutes so if you watch 2 hours of television you get 30-45 minutes of added exercise!
  - Fit Hint: You will burn more calories by standing and washing dishes in the sink rather than letting the dishwasher do the dishes. Plus it saves water!
2. Aerobic Exercises – Called Cardiovascular exercises, these include activities such as walking, running, biking, swimming, and dancing. Benefits of Cardio Exercise are improved energy, enhanced blood circulation, increased heart and lung functioning, reduced health risks, and it aids in weight loss by burning calories.
  - Fit Hint: Get some fresh air. Walking outside is great for your mental and physical health. Also walking at the mall keeps you active while your mind stays focused on other things and people.
  - Fit Hint: Walk and talk. You can talk on the phone and burn calories at the same time and talking will help the time go faster. If you are in the house on the phone march in place during your call.
  - Fit Hint: At the grocery store, park further away from the door. Start your shopping at the fruits and vegetables section and walk every aisle until you reach the other side. This will give you many things to occupy your mind while getting in unnoticed steps.
3. Strength Training Exercises – Strength training exercises include lift light weights and stretching with elastic bands or plastic tubes. This type of exercise helps build strong bones and muscles, and the more muscle you have it leads to faster metabolism. There are strength exercises that can be done lying down, sitting up, kneeling or standing.
  - Fit Hint: Exercising with a friend makes the time go faster. Not only do you encourage each other, you get some extra time to keep up on each other's life which helps eliminate loneliness or depression.

- Fit Hint: While putting away groceries you can do arm curls with the can goods and other items to build strength in the arms.

So exercise your rights! Exercise at the time of day that's right for you. For some it's morning, for others the afternoon is better. But no matter what time you choose to exercise it's the "Get up and get moving" that is all important.

Remember, exercising should be a part of your healthy lifestyle to enhance your life and help you maintain your independence. You should check your Health Plan benefits to find out if you have an exercise or gym benefit available to you. Also remember, you should check with your Personal Care Physician at the next visit regarding your individual exercise program needs and recommendations. Or better yet, schedule a visit now to discuss starting a new Exercise Program and get on the road to a healthier, happier life style beginning now!