

Active at Any Size

Part 3—Physical Activity

Bicycling (non-weight-bearing)

You can bicycle indoors on a stationary bike, or outdoors on a road bike. Biking does not stress any one part of the body—your weight is spread between your arms, back, and hips.

You may want to use a recumbent bike. On this type of bike, you sit low to the ground with your legs reaching forward to the pedals. This may feel better than sitting upright. The seat on a recumbent bike is also wider than the seat on an upright bike.

For biking outdoors, you may want to try a mountain bike. These bikes have wider tires and are heavy. You can also buy a larger seat to put on your bike.

Make sure the bike you buy has a weight rating at least as high as your own weight.

Stretching (weight-bearing or non-weight-bearing)

Stretching may help you

- Be more flexible.
- Feel more relaxed.
- Improve posture.
- Keep your muscles from getting tight after doing other physical activities.

You do not have to set aside a special time or place to stretch. At home or at work, stand up, push your arms toward the ceiling, and stretch. Stretch slowly and only enough to feel tightness—not until you feel pain. Hold the stretch, without bouncing, for about 30 seconds. Do not stretch cold muscles.

Yoga and tai chi are types of stretching. They help you breathe deeply, relax, and get rid of stress.

Your local fitness center may offer yoga, tai chi, or other stretching classes. You may want to start with “gentle” classes, like those aimed at seniors.

Questions to Ask When Choosing a Fitness Center

- Can the treadmills or benches support people who are large?

- Do the fitness staff know how to work with people of larger sizes?
- Can I take time to see how I like the center before I sign up?
- Is the aim to have fun and get healthy—not to lose weight?

Lifestyle Activities

Lifestyle physical activities do not have to be planned. You can make small changes to make your day more physically active and improve your health. For example:

- Take 2 to 3 minute walking breaks at work a few times a day.
- Put away the TV remote control—get up to change the channel.
- March in place during TV commercials.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Stand or walk, rather than sit, while talking on the phone.
- Play with your family—kids, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, etc.
- Walk to your coworker’s office rather than use the phone or e-mail.

Even a shopping trip can be exercise: it is a chance to walk and carry your bags. In addition, doing chores like lawn mowing, leaf raking, gardening, and housework can count as activity.

Applaud yourself!

If you can do only a few or none of these activities, it’s OK. Remember to appreciate what you can do, even if you think it’s a small amount. Just moving any part of your body—even for a short time—can make you healthier.

Tips for Safe Physical Activity

Slow down if your feel out of breath. You should be able to talk during your activity, without gasping for breath.

Drink water when you are thirsty to replace the water you lose by sweating. Water helps every cell and organ in your body work. It cushions your joints, helps keep you regular, keeps your body cool, and prevents dehydration when you are sweating.

Wear suitable clothes.

- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting tops so you can move easily.
- Wear clothes made of fabrics that absorb sweat and remove it from your skin.
- Never wear rubber or plastic suits. Plastic suits could hold the sweat on your skin and make your body overheat.

- Women should wear a good support bra.
- Wear supportive athletic shoes for weight-bearing activities.
- Wear a knit hat to keep you warm when you are physically active outdoors in cold weather. Wear a tightly woven, wide-brimmed hat in hot weather to help keep you cool and protect you from the sun.
- Wear sunscreen when you are physically active outdoors.
- Wear garments that prevent inner-thigh chafing, such as tights or spandex shorts.

Stop your activity right away if you

- Have pain, tightness, or pressure in your chest or neck, shoulder, or arm.
- Feel dizzy or sick.
- Break out in a cold sweat.
- Have muscle cramps.
- Are extremely short of breath.
- Feel pain in your joints, feet, ankles, or legs. You could hurt yourself if you ignore the pain.

Ask your health care provider what to do if you have any of these symptoms.

Healthy, fit bodies come in all sizes. Whatever your size or shape, get physically active now and keep moving for a healthier life!