

Regular physical activity for a better health

The concept has been around for centuries, but only in the last 20 years has science caught up with it. Compelling evidence shows that *those who lead a physically active life are healthier, live longer, and have a better quality of life* than those who are inactive. Physical activity helps to prevent or delay the onset of some of the world's most prevalent health scourges including cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, osteoporosis, colon cancer, and the health complications associated with being overweight and obese. Not only that, but an active lifestyle also enhances mood, alleviates depression, and facilitates stress management. In the long term, physical activity can improve self-esteem, mental alertness, and increase social interaction.

For men and women of all ages, the stated benefits of an active lifestyle can be increased if coupled with good dietary habits, particularly, by consuming more vegetables, fruits and cereals, and less fatty and high caloric foods.



⇒ The term **physical activity** refers to a wide array of muscle movements, and it should not be confused or equated with on the practice of sports. In fact, the good news is that even moderate type of exercises such as walking, dancing, biking or taking the stairs, can bring about health benefits.

⇒ **Older adults** who carry out regular physical activity will strengthen their muscles and improve their coordination skills, enabling them to remain active and preserve their level of independent living. Moreover, being physically active as one advances in age helps to maintain mental agility, and by promoting social interaction, helps to reduce feelings of isolation.

⇒ Among **children and adolescents**, physical activity helps to improve school performance, increases the sense of personal responsibility, and decreases the consumption of drugs and alcohol. However, in younger ages, physical activity also needs to include the practice of sports or exercises, since these are critical in promoting youth physical development and well being.

In economic terms, a physically active lifestyle is a money-saving financial investment. For every US\$ 1.00 invested in physical activity, particularly in terms of time and equipment, US\$ 3.20 in medical costs is saved.

In order to multiply the benefits of leading a physically active life, a **well-balanced and varied diet** is highly desirable. Some tips for planning a healthy diet include: base the diet on cereals, fruits and vegetables; eat moderate amounts of meat; and include some dairy products.

BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Better fitness
- Increased vitality and energy
- Stronger bones and muscles
- Improved immune system
- Delayed onset or prevention of chronic disease
- Delayed decline in motor performance
- Weight control, reduced stress, anxiety and depression
- Greater opportunities to meet and interact with others
- Prolonged ability for independent living among older adults

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Celebrating 100 years of health and the World Health Day 2002 dedicated to Physical Activity!

