

Physical Activity: How much is needed?

“Physical activity is all movements in everyday life, including work, recreation, exercise, and sporting activities...” WHO, 1997

Physical activity need not be strenuous to be beneficial. For an average sedentary adult, engaging in at least **30 minutes** of physical activity of moderate intensity, every day or on most days of the week will be sufficient to obtain health benefits. Moreover, those 30 minutes can be **accumulated throughout the day** in small bouts of activity or exercise. It is not necessary to practice vigorous sports, join costly fitness clubs, or purchase special equipment to achieve health benefits.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines physical activity as “all movements in everyday life, including work, recreation, exercise and sporting activities.” In fact, physical activity is a broad term that encompasses activities that range in intensity from taking the stairs regularly, dancing and walking briskly, to jogging, biking and practicing sports. Moderate physical activity can be carried out by anyone, at no cost, and be accommodated into any daily life schedule.

TYPES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	
<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking briskly • Walking downstairs • Dancing • Biking • Swimming • Gardening • Housework, e.g. washing floors or windows, etc. 	<p>Vigorous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jogging • Walking upstairs • Fast dancing • Biking up a hill • Aerobics • Jump-roping • Sports, e.g. soccer, basketball, etc.

The strong evidence in favor of the health benefits of moderate physical activity does not rule out the importance of exercising more intensely or practicing sports. In fact, it is important to remember that **increasing the time, intensity, or frequency** of physical activity will result in greater health benefits.

Frequency is key to achieving the health benefits of physical activity. Physical activity of moderate intensity needs to be performed regularly. Unfortunately, the positive health benefits of physical activity diminish quickly when one stops being active. For instance, the effects of a 30-minute walk or a 20-minute jog in lowering cholesterol and triglyceride may only last 50 hours. Thus, adhering to an active life on a regularly basis is fundamental.



√ An example of how combining the types of exercise with the time and frequency devoted to them works –

Physical activity of moderate intensity practiced daily or at least five days a week has the equivalent health effects as vigorous exercise performed three times a week. This same amount of physical activity can be achieved by different activities. For instance, 15 minutes of stair-climbing, 30 minutes of fast dancing, and 45 minutes of volleyball are similar in the total amount of physical activity achieved.

