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Physical Activity: Suggestions and Tips [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 09/2013

Key Messages:

- Regular physical activity may help lower your risk of cancer, as well as improve your quality of life and mood.
- Most people should participate in some type of physical activity to improve and maintain their health, although the duration and intensity of activity will differ for each person.
- Talk with your doctor or another member of the health care team about an appropriate exercise program.

Defining different levels of activity

Moderate and vigorous activities can be done in many different places, including at home, outside, or in a gym.

Moderate activities. During a moderate exercise, you should expect to breathe as hard as you would when walking quickly. You should be able to talk, but would prefer not to. Walking is a great, moderate activity. Other examples of moderate activities include biking and housework.

Vigorous activities. During a vigorous activity, your heart will beat faster and you will be breathing more heavily and sweating. Examples of vigorous activities include jogging or running and swimming.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the American Cancer Society provide the following recommendations for participating in a physically active lifestyle.

- Be moderately active, in addition to other daily activities, for at least 150 minutes or vigorously active for at least 75 minutes each week; it is best to spread these activities throughout the week
- To lose weight, participate in moderate to vigorous activity 60 minutes per day on most days of the week.
- Exercise for several shorter sessions if you don't have the time or energy for a longer session. The health benefits of several short, 10-minute segments are similar to a one longer

session of exercise.
- Start slow if you are new to exercise and gradually increase the length and intensity of your physical activity to 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity a day.
- Aim for a body mass index (BMI; the ratio of a person?s weight and height) between 18.5 and 25.
- Avoid weight gain if you are not underweight.

Tips for children and teens

Childhood activity levels may predict how active a person is as an adult. Children and adolescents should be moderately to vigorously active for at least 60 minutes a day and engage in a vigorous activity at least three days per week. This can be done by reducing the amount of time your children and teens watch television, play video games, and use the computer or other electronic devices, as well as by participating in sports or fitness activities or playing actively at school or home.

Tips for adults

Increasing physical activity at any age provides important health benefits. Regular physical activity can help avoid some of the effects of aging, as well reduce the risk for a variety of diseases. Men older than 40, women older than 50, and people with chronic illnesses and/or who have any kind of heart problem should talk with their doctors about how to safely begin physical activity. If an older person has problems with exercise because of poor balance, weakness, pain, or other health conditions, exercising with a specialist is safest.

Questions to ask your doctor about physical activity

Your doctor or another member of the health care team can help answer questions you have about physical activity and suggest resources that can help you set up an exercise routine. Consider asking your doctor:

- How will exercise improve my health?
- What type of exercise should I do?
- Are there weight limitations or specific exercises I should avoid?
- How many times a week should I exercise?
- How long should I exercise at each session?
- How strenuous does my exercise session need to be?
- Should I do more than one type of exercise?
- What resources are available to me?
- Who can help me set up a safe exercise program?

More Information

Physical Activity and Cancer Risk [3]

Risk Factors and Prevention [4]

Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Control?s Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity: Physical Activity [5]

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: Guide to Physical Activity [6]

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans [7]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/prevention-and-healthy-living/physical-activity/physical-activity-suggestions-and-tips
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24995
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/24868
[5] http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/index.html
[6] http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/phy_act.htm
[7] http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/adultguide/default.aspx