

Physical Activity Matters

Important Steps for **YOUR** Health

Physical Activity and the Health Benefits of Regular Exercise



NorthCare Network

Physical Activity Matters-Part 3

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says, “Regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health.”

What is exercise and how does it work?

Exercise is a form of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and performed with the goal of improving health or fitness.¹

Exercise, or physical activity, makes you feel better and triggers beneficial chemicals in your brain—**serotonin**, **endorphins**, and **dopamine**—that dull pain, lighten mood, and relieve stress. It provides **psychological and emotional benefits**. It can protect against diseases and prevent early death.



Why is a balanced fitness program so important?

A balanced fitness program includes **aerobic** (for endurance), **muscle strengthening** (for resistance), and **stretching exercises** (for flexibility and balance). Contracting muscles help promote new tissue growth and repair. Aerobic exercise improves cardiorespiratory fitness and increases oxygen flow to the brain. This makes your **heart stronger and improves mental alertness**. Through regular exercise, your blood pressure, blood sugars, and cholesterol can be lowered.

It is important to do all types of exercise, including combinations of **moderate** and **vigorous** activities. Activities can range from brisk walking (**aerobic**), to lifting weights (**muscle and bone strengthening**), and yoga (**flexibility**). Here are a few additional guidelines:

- Choose physical activities that are appropriate for your age and fitness level in consultation with **your doctor(s) or health provider(s)**.
- People who have been inactive should “**start slow**” and **gradually increase** activity levels over time.
- Be sure to use **appropriate gear** for whatever activities you pick. Dress warmly for winter activities, and for other activities like walking or running, be sure to wear good footwear with proper support to prevent injuries.
- Adults with disabilities should consult with care providers for activities that are appropriate for their abilities. Organizations, like **SAIL—the Disability Network of the Upper Peninsula**—have group and individualized health and recreational activities,





like dancing, biking, and kayaking, through their **SPAR (Single Point for Activities and Recreation) program**. No matter what your ability level, there are fitness options available.

The Importance of Aerobic Exercise-Moderate and Vigorous. There are degrees of aerobic exercise from inactive, moderate, to vigorous. Aerobic exercise has two main health benefits: *it reduces stress and builds stamina.*

- Moderate exercise includes light yard or house work, brisk walking, or biking at a casual pace.
- Vigorous exercise includes jogging/running, swimming, cross-country skiing, or dancing.

General Guidelines for Exercise and Physical Activity

Set aside some time every day for fitness. For adults *over the age of 40, a weekly minimum of 150 minutes (or 30 minutes, five days a week)* is recommended for health benefits. If you can exercise closer to *300 minutes (one hour, five days a week)*, this will provide additional health benefits.

If these goals are not realistic, *any activity is better than none*. **Inactivity should be avoided** as it puts you at higher “risk for serious diseases and early death.”

Factors of Exercise. Set exercise goals for **1) frequency** (how often), **2) intensity** (how hard), and **3) duration** (how much time spent) or **distance** (how far) doing your activities. By gradually increasing these factors, your health benefits should increase. **Frequency is the most important factor** for improving your physical fitness.



Physical exercise is an important part of wellness, along with good nutrition and sufficient rest. Exercise is also proven to reduce chronic pain over time. Remember, it's never too late to start exercising.

It's Your Choice.

Exercise can relieve stress and anxiety; improve muscle and bone development; reduce fat and control weight; improve blood pressure and cholesterol; and contribute to better health and longevity.