
FOCUS ON HEALTH

Health & Nutrition Newsletter for Perry County

January, 2008

A New Year is Here!

Look great in 2008? Chances are, you already know that physical activity is good for you. “Sure,” you may say. “When I get out and move around, I know it helps me to feel and look better.” But, you may not realize just *how* important regular physical activity is to your health. If you get regular physical activity, congratulations! If you’re not yet getting all the activity you need, you have lots of company. Make a point to change that with the new year.

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Getting Healthy in 2008
- 1-3 Physical Activity and Your Health
- 4 New Walking Program
- 4 Strong Women Program

Physical Activity

What does it mean to get “regular physical activity?” To reduce the risk of heart disease, adults need only do about 30 minutes of moderate activity on most, and preferably all, days of the week. This level of activity can also lower your chances of having a stroke, colon cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes and other medical problems. If you are trying to manage your weight and prevent gradual, unhealthy weight gain, try to get 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity on most days of the week.

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for developing coronary artery disease. Coronary artery disease is characterized by deposits of fatty substances, cholesterol, calcium and other substances in the inner lining of arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle. It also contributes to other risk factors that include obesity, high blood pressure, high triglycerides, a low level of HDL (“good”) cholesterol and diabetes. Even moderately intense physical activity, such as brisk walking, is beneficial when done regularly for a total of 30 minutes or longer on most or all days.

Why is exercise or physical activity important?

Regular aerobic physical activity increases your fitness level and capacity for exercise. It also plays a role in both primary and secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease. Physical inactivity is a major risk for heart disease and stroke and is linked to cardiovascular mortality.

Regular physical activity can help control blood lipid abnormalities, diabetes and obesity.

Aerobic physical activity can also help reduce high blood pressure. The results of pooled studies show that people who modify their behavior and start regular physical activity after heart attack have better rates of survival and better quality of life. Healthy people as well as many patients with cardiovascular disease can improve their fitness and exercise performance with training.

How can physical activity help condition my body?

- Some activities improve flexibility, some build muscular strength and some increase endurance.
- Some forms of continuous activities involve using the large muscles in your arms or legs. These are called endurance or aerobic exercises. They help the heart by making it work more efficiently during exercise and at rest.
- Brisk walking, jumping rope, jogging, bicycling, cross-country skiing and dancing are examples of aerobic activities that increase endurance.

How can I improve my physical fitness?

Programs designed to improve physical fitness take into account frequency (how often), intensity (how hard), and time (how long). Programs that take all three of these factors into account provide the best conditioning.

The FIT Formula:

F = frequency (days per week)

I = intensity (how hard, e.g., easy, moderate, vigorous) or the percentage of heart rate (beats per minute)

T = time (amount for each session or day)

AHA Recommendation

For most healthy people:

For health benefits to the heart, lungs and circulation, perform any moderate-to-vigorous-intensity aerobic activity for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week at 50–85 percent of your maximum heart rate. You can accumulate 30 minutes in 10 or 15 minute sessions. What's important is to include physical activity as part of a regular routine.

These activities are especially beneficial when done regularly:

- brisk walking, hiking, stair-climbing, aerobic exercise
- jogging, running, bicycling, rowing and swimming
- activities such as soccer and basketball that include continuous running

The training effects of such activities are most apparent at exercise intensities that exceed 50 percent of a person's exercise capacity (maximum heart rate). If you're physically active regularly for longer periods or at greater intensity, you're likely to benefit more. But don't overdo it. Too much exercise can give you sore muscles and increase the risk of injury.

What about moderate-intensity activities?

Even moderate-intensity activities, when performed daily, can have some long-term health benefits. They help lower the risk of cardiovascular diseases. Here are some examples:

- walking for pleasure, gardening and yard work
- housework, dancing and prescribed home exercise
- recreational activities such as tennis, racquetball, soccer, basketball and touch football

What risk factors are reduced?

Regular physical activity can also help reduce or eliminate some of these risk factors:

- **High blood pressure** — Regular aerobic activities can lower blood pressure.
- **Cigarette smoking** — Smokers who become physically active are more likely to cut down or stop smoking.
- **Low levels of HDL** — Low levels of HDL ("good") cholesterol (less than 40 mg/dL for men/less than 50 mg/dL for women) have been linked to a higher risk of coronary artery disease. Recent studies have shown that regular physical activity can significantly increase HDL cholesterol levels and thus reduce your risk for coronary artery disease.

- **Diabetes** — People at their ideal weight are less likely to develop diabetes. Physical activity may also decrease insulin requirements for people with diabetes.
- **Obesity and overweight** — Regular physical activity can help people lose excess fat or stay at a reasonable weight.
- **High levels of triglycerides** — Physical activity helps reduce triglyceride levels. High triglycerides have been linked to coronary artery disease in some people.

What are other benefits of physical activity?

- Physical activity builds healthy bones, muscles and joints, and reduces the risk of colon cancer. Millions of Americans suffer from illnesses that can be prevented or improved through regular physical activity.
- Physical activity also helps psychologically. It reduces feelings of depression and anxiety, improves mood and promotes a sense of well-being.
- The 1996 Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity also suggests that active people have a lower risk for stroke than inactive people.

We're here to help you get fit and healthy. Just call the Extension office, for more information on the programs being offered.



Walk Away the Pounds!

**Looking for a fun way to lose weight and get in shape?
Make new friends . . .
Burn fat, tone muscle, feel great!**

We are offering this special class on Tuesdays and Fridays at the Perry County Historical Museum beginning January 25th at 9:00 a.m. The Perry County Historical Museum is located at the corner of Main Street & Plum Street. All you need to bring for the popular indoor walking program is a good pair of walking shoes and a good attitude.

To learn more, call me at the office at 889-2661.

Strong Women

If you are looking for a weight training program, you can join us for our Strong Women program. This is a light-weight exercise program aimed at preventing osteoporosis in older women. We meet Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 11:00 a.m. at the Max Milam Library in Perryville. If you would like more information, call Lucy at the Extension office. We hope you can join us!

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