



**AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
OBSTETRICIANS AND
GYNECOLOGISTS**

Exercise and Fitness: A Guide for Women

Regular physical activity — exercise that is done on most days — has many health benefits. Despite its advantages, however, more than 60 percent of American adults do not exercise on a regular basis.

Benefits of Exercise

One of the most important benefits of regular physical activity is that it promotes cardiovascular fitness — that is, it strengthens your heart and circulatory system.

Physical activity helps build and maintain strong bones. Active women have stronger bones than women who do not exercise.

Physical benefits are not all you get with regular exercise. Staying active promotes mental well-being, relieves stress, and reduces feelings of depression and anxiety.

Moderate daily physical activity totaling 30 minutes, which may be spread throughout the day, can offer health benefits.

Types of Exercise

Two types of exercises — aerobic and resistance training — can help your body in a variety of ways. A combination of both is the most effective.

Aerobic exercise causes your heart and lungs to work harder and builds fitness.

It also burns more calories, which helps if you're trying to lose or maintain weight. Aerobic exercise includes, for example, walking, jogging, swimming and dancing.

Resistance training builds muscle and slows bone loss. It strengthens muscles and bones by exerting force on them. Resistance training includes lifting weights and doing leg lifts or squats.

Getting Started

Before starting an exercise program, you should be in good health.

There are programs designed especially for certain women, such as older women or those with health problems.

If it has been some time since you've exercised regularly, it's best to start slowly.

Many health clubs and gyms offer individual training services. You may want to consult a fitness instructor who can set a routine for you to follow under his or her supervision or on your own.

There are also many videos, books, and magazines available on exercise and fitness. They can provide tips on getting and staying in shape.

Plan your exercise program to suit your interests and lifestyle.

Warming Up and Cooling Down

Make it a practice to start each exercise session with a warm-up period for five to 10 minutes. This is light

activity, such as slow walking or stationary cycling at a low resistance, that prepares your muscles for more intense activity.

After exercising, cool down by slowly reducing your activity. Cooling down for five to 10 minutes and stretching again will increase flexibility and prevent muscle soreness.

Target Heart Rate

You should exercise so that your heart beats at the level that gives you the best workout. This is called your target heart rate.

Target Heart Rate for Women
Your maximum heart rate is 220 minus your age. Your target rate is 60 percent to 80 percent of the maximum

Exercise resulting in a heart rate above 80 percent of your maximum heart rate may be too much unless you're in top physical shape. Exercise resulting in a heart rate below 60 percent gives too little conditioning.

You should aim to exercise about 20 to 30 minutes while in your target heart rate.

How Often?

Physical activity should be a part of most, if not all, days of the week. A form of aerobic exercise should be done three times a week.

Things to Watch

If you are over-doing exercise, your body may give you some warnings. Be alert to injuries or any other changes in your body.

Injuries

Exercise and sports activities can increase your risk of injury to muscle, bones and joints. It is important not to overdo it when you begin an exercise program.

One way to avoid injury is to rest on some days or alternate between vigorous and lighter activity.

Menstrual Changes

Vigorous exercise over a long time span may cause changes in your menstrual cycle. Rarely, a woman's periods stop completely. If you notice changes in your periods or if they stop altogether, see your doctor.

Finally ...

Making exercise a part of your life can pay off in many ways. It can make you look and feel better. Take time for yourself to exercise every day.

Remember, physical activity does not have to be part of a formal program. Become more active throughout the day.

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