

Active *at Any Size*



National Institute of
Diabetes and Digestive
and Kidney Diseases

WIN Weight-control
Information Network

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Introduction

Would you like to make physical activity a part of your life, but are not sure how to do it?

Good news—you can be active at any size—and have fun and feel good doing it!

Physical activity may seem difficult when you are overweight or obese. You may get short of breath quickly. Your feet or joints may hurt. It may be hard or costly to find the right clothes and equipment. And you may feel self-conscious working out in front of others.

Facing these challenges may be hard—but it can be done! This brochure will give you many tips and resources for being more active and healthier at any size.

▶ See the Weight-control Information Network (WIN) website at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov> for more resources to help you improve your health.



TOOLS YOU CAN USE

Do I need to see my health care provider before I start?

Talk to your health care provider if you

- have a chronic disease like diabetes, high blood pressure, and/or heart disease
- have a bone or joint problem (for example, back, knee, or hip) that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity
- are unsure of your health status or have any concerns that exercise might be unsafe for you

If any of these concerns apply to you, ask your doctor about ways to safely make physical activity part of your life.

Why should I be active?

Physical activity may help you live longer and protect you from developing serious health problems, like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Regular physical activity is linked to many health benefits. It helps you feel better because it may

- ▶ lower blood pressure and blood sugar
- ▶ help build healthy bones, muscles, and joints
- ▶ help your heart and lungs work better
- ▶ boost energy during the day, aid in sleeping at night, and improve mood

When combined with a healthy eating pattern, regular physical activity may also help you control your weight.

Being active with others can be a lot of fun! It may give you a chance to meet new people or spend more time with family and friends.

How can I be active safely?

The activities in this brochure are safe for most people. But if you have health concerns or any problems moving or being steady on your feet, talk to your health care provider before you start. See the box “Do I need to see my health care provider before I start?” for more information.

If you have been inactive for a while, start slowly and check how you are feeling. Avoid high-impact activities, as jumping and landing on a hard surface could lead to injury. Make your workouts harder and longer as you feel more comfortable.

When you do physical activity, your body tries to cool itself down by sweating. You can lose water when you are working out. To keep your body hydrated, remember to drink fluids. Water is a great choice. Sports beverages are also an option, but they have a lot of sugar and will give you extra calories.

When outdoors, protect yourself from the sun by putting on sunscreen and wearing a hat or visor and protective clothing.

► Stay safe while working out. Slow down and stop if you see any of the warning signs in the **“Tools You Can Use”** box on page 4.



TOOLS YOU CAN USE

What are the warning signs that I should stop?

Stop your activity right away and seek help if you

- have pain, tightness, or pressure in your chest or neck, shoulder, or arm
- feel dizzy or sick
- are extremely short of breath
- feel pain in your joints, feet, ankles, or legs. You could hurt yourself if you ignore the pain

Ask your health care provider what to do if you have any of these symptoms.

What kinds of activities can I do?

You do not need special skills or equipment to make physical activity part of your life. Many types of activities may help improve your health—from things you do every day, like walking your dog, to planned exercises.

Try different activities that you enjoy. Read on for some ideas. Anything that gets you moving around—even for a few minutes at a time—is a healthy start to getting fit.

Walking

Walking is the most popular physical activity among adults. It is low cost, convenient, and generally doesn't require any special clothes or equipment.

Walking will help you

- ▶ improve your fitness
- ▶ burn calories
- ▶ feel more energetic

Concerns about safety can keep some people from walking. Choose a safe and well-lit area to walk. Try walking in places you enjoy, like a park or shopping mall. Bring along a friend or family member to chat with you, as this type of social support may help you meet your activity goals. Many malls and parks have benches where you can take a quick break if it is hard for you to walk for a long time.

If you don't have time for a long walk, add short walks instead. For example, instead of a 30-minute walk, add three 10-minute walks to your day. This makes it easier to fit your activity into a busy schedule.



▶ To learn how to create your own walking plan, see the WIN brochure *Walking...A Step in the Right Direction*, listed in the Resources section

▶ **Tips for Walking**

- Wear comfortable walking shoes that offer a lot of support.
- Warm up by walking more slowly for the first few minutes of your walk before picking up the pace. When you are ready to stop, cool down by slowing your pace.
- Start by walking short distances and add more as you feel comfortable.

TOOLS YOU CAN USE

What should I wear when working out?

- Wear clothes made of fabrics that absorb sweat and remove it from your skin.
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting tops that allow you to move easily. Women should wear a good support bra.
- Wear stretchy bottoms that are comfortable and prevent inner-thigh chafing, such as tights or spandex shorts.

Dancing

Dancing can be a lot of fun. You can dance in a health club, a dance studio, or even at home. To dance at home, just move your body to some lively music or to a dance workout on your TV or computer.

Dancing may help

- ▶ tone your muscles
- ▶ make your heart stronger
- ▶ make your lungs work better

If it is hard for you to stand on your feet for a long time, dancing while sitting down may be an option. Sometimes called chair dancing, this activity lets you move your arms and legs to music while taking the weight off your feet.

Bicycling

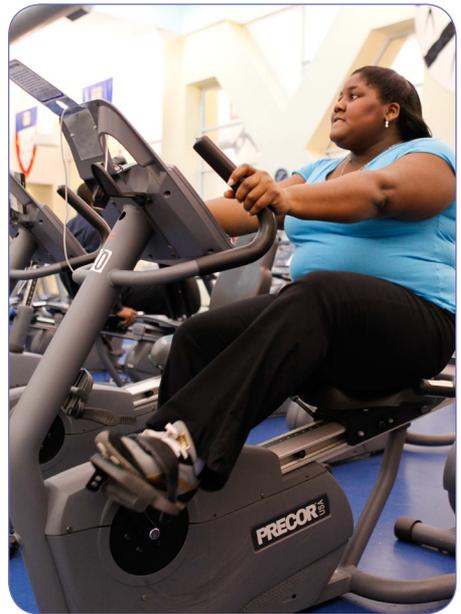
Riding a bike does not stress any one part of the body—your weight is spread among your arms, back, and hips. You can bicycle indoors on a stationary bike, or outdoors on a road bike.

You may want to use a recumbent bike. On this type of bike, you sit lower to the ground with your legs reaching forward to

the pedals. This may feel better than sitting upright. The seat on a recumbent bike is also wider than the seat on an upright bike.

For biking outdoors, you may want to try a mountain bike. These bikes have wider tires and are sturdy. You can also buy a larger seat to put on your bike.

If you decide to buy a bike, check its weight rating (the number of pounds it can support) to make sure it is safe for you.



Water Workouts

Swimming and water workouts put less stress on your joints than walking, jogging, or biking because you do not have to lift or push your own weight. If your feet, back, or joints hurt when you stand, these activities may be best for you. If you feel self-conscious or cannot find a good bathing suit, you can wear shorts and a T-shirt while you swim.

Exercising in water

- ▶ **helps flexibility.** You can move your body in water in ways you cannot on land.
- ▶ **reduces risk of injury.** Water makes your body float. This keeps your joints from being pounded or jarred and helps prevent sore muscles and injury.
- ▶ **keeps you refreshed.** You can keep cool in water—even when you are working hard.

You do not need to know how to swim to work out in water—you can do shallow-water or deep-water exercises without swimming.

For **shallow-water workouts**, the water level should be between your waist and your chest. Try walking in place, moving your arms from side to side, and throwing punches in front of you.

During **deep-water workouts**, most of your body is underwater. For safety and comfort, wear a foam belt or life jacket.

TOOLS YOU CAN USE

What if I don't want to mess up my hair in the pool?

If you are worried about damage to your hair from the pool water or don't want to mess up your hairstyle, try these tips:

- A swim cap may protect your hair from getting wet. After your workout, remove the cap, refresh your style, and go.
- A natural hairstyle, short braids, or locs may be easier than long hair to take care of after a water workout.
- If your hair does feel damaged after a swim, you can find shampoos to remove chlorine buildup at most drug stores.

Strength Training

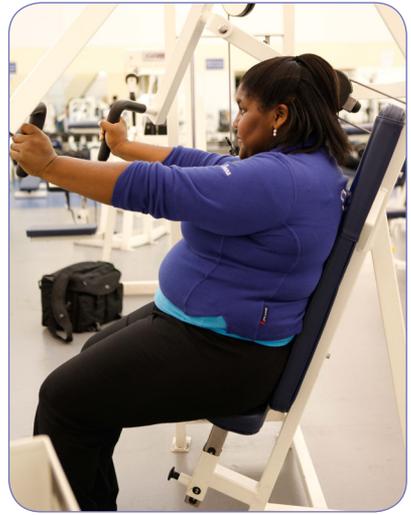
This type of activity uses free weights, weight lifting machines, resistance bands, or your own body weight to strengthen your muscles.

Strength training may help you

- ▶ build and maintain strong muscles as you get older
- ▶ maintain function in daily activities
- ▶ keep your bones strong

If you are just starting out, using a weight lifting machine may be safer than dumbbells. As you increase your muscle fitness, you may want to add free weight exercises.

You do not need weight benches or large dumbbells to do strength training at home. You can use a pair of hand weights or even two soup cans or milk jugs filled with water or rice. You can also use your own body weight—for example, by getting up and down from a chair or doing push-ups.



Proper form is very important when lifting weights. You may want to schedule a session with a personal trainer to learn what exercises to do and how to do them safely. You may need to check with your health insurer about whether this service is covered by your plan.

If you decide to buy a home gym, check its weight rating (the number of pounds it can support) to make sure it is safe for you.

▶ **Strength Training Tips**

- Aim for 2 to 3 days per week of strength training activities.
- For each exercise, aim for 8 to 12 repetitions. If that's too hard, the weight you are lifting is too heavy. If it's too easy, your weight is too light.
- Give your muscles time to recover. Do not work the same muscles 2 days in a row.

Mind and Body Exercise

Your local fitness center may also offer classes like yoga, tai chi, or Pilates. These types of activities may help you

- ▶ become more flexible and increase strength
- ▶ feel more relaxed
- ▶ improve balance and posture

These types of classes can add variety to your workout routine and be a lot of fun. If some movements are hard for you to do or if you have any injuries you are concerned about, talk to the instructor about ways to adapt the exercises and poses to meet your needs or start with a class for beginners.

Daily Life Activities

Lifestyle activities, such as gardening or washing the car, are great ways to get moving. Small changes can add more physical activity to your day and improve your health. Try these:

- ▶ If possible, take 2- to 3-minute walking breaks at work several times a day.
- ▶ Stand or walk in place during TV commercials.
- ▶ Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator whenever possible.

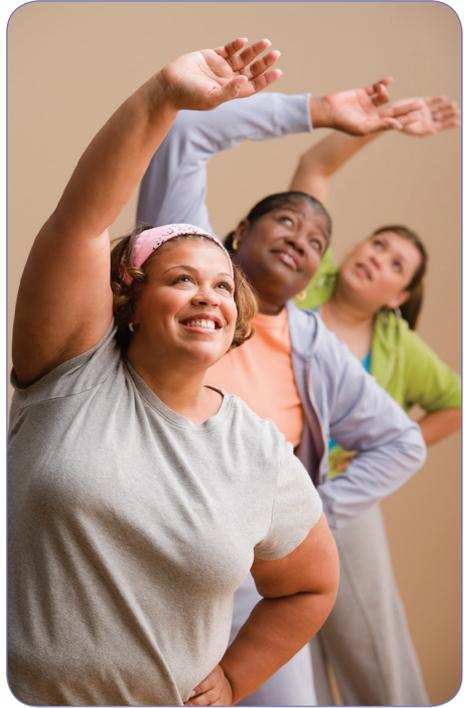


Even a shopping trip can be exercise, because it is a chance to walk and carry your bags. Doing chores like lawn mowing, raking leaves, gardening, and housework also count.

Where can I be active?

There are many fun places to be active. Here are some options:

- ▶ Join a local fitness center or community recreation center (see the “Tools You Can Use” box on this page for questions to ask when choosing a fitness center).
- ▶ Enjoy the outdoors by going for a walk at a safe local park.
- ▶ Work out in the comfort of your living room by checking out a workout DVD at your local public library.



TOOLS YOU CAN USE

What questions should I ask when choosing a fitness center?

- Do you have exercise equipment appropriate for people who weigh more? What kind of support will your staff provide on how to use the equipment?
- Do you offer any special classes for people who are starting out, older adults, or people with mobility issues?
- Can I try out the center before I sign up?

How can I get past my roadblocks?

Think about your barriers to being active. Then try to come up with creative ways to address them. Here are a few examples to help you get started.

Barrier	Solution
I don't have enough time!	Instead of doing one long session of exercise, build in several short bursts (3 to 5 minutes) that will not disrupt your day. Try to walk more while doing your errands and walk in place during commercials or while on the phone. Simply standing up instead of sitting at your desk also has benefits.
I just don't like exercise.	Good news—you do not have to run or do push-ups to get the benefits of physical activity. Try dancing to the radio or being active with friends to make exercise more enjoyable. Many people find that they like exercise better the more they do it.
I'm worried about my health or injury.	If you have a hard time being active because of your health, talk to a health care provider first. A certified fitness professional can also guide you on how to be active safely.
I feel self-conscious working out in front of others.	Start with exercise at home until you feel confident. Be active with friends who will support and encourage you. Having someone "in your corner" may make you feel less self-conscious.
<i>(Add your barrier.)</i>	<i>(Add your solution.)</i>
<i>(Add your barrier.)</i>	<i>(Add your solution.)</i>

How can I stick with my healthy habits?

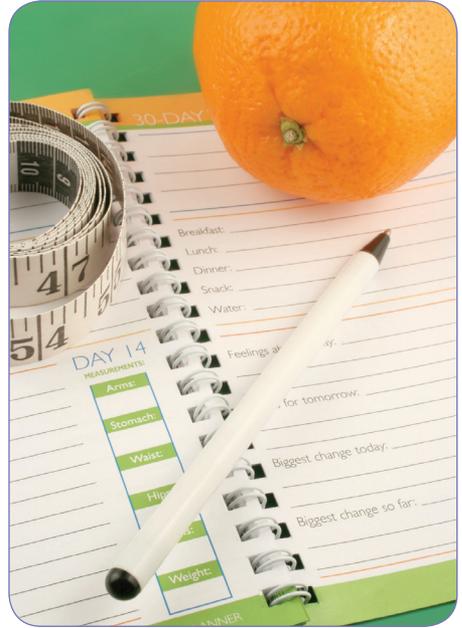
Keeping an activity journal is a useful tool to help you stay motivated, stay on track, and reach your goals. It may be helpful to set a short-term goal, a long-term goal, and rewards for meeting those goals. Use the sample activity journal on page 16 to help you stick with your healthy habits.

Set short-term and long-term goals. Getting started with a doable goal is a great way to form a new habit. A short-term goal may be to walk 5 to 10 minutes, 5 days

a week. A long-term goal may be to do at least 30 minutes of physical activity at a moderate intensity level (activity that makes you breathe harder but does not overwork or overheat you) on most days of the week.

To get you started, write down a goal in the sample activity journal. Be specific. For example, instead of “I will be more active,” set a goal like “I will go for a walk after lunch at least 2 days per week.”

Set rewards. Whether your goal was to be active for 15 minutes a day, to walk farther than you did last week, or simply to stay positive, recognizing your efforts is an important part of staying on track. Some ideas for rewards include new music to charge you up or 30 minutes of quiet time to yourself.



Write down how you will reward yourself in “My Activity Journal” on page 16.

Get support. Get a family member or friend to be physically active with you. It may be more fun and your buddy can cheer you on and help you stick with it.

Write down who will support you in “My Activity Journal.”



Track progress. You may not feel like you are making progress but when you look back at where you started, you may be pleasantly surprised! You can make copies of the blank activity journal to keep track of your efforts.

Sample Activity Journal

GOALS

My short-term goal: Walk at least 3 days this week.

My long-term goal: Get 30 minutes of physical activity every day.

REWARD

My reward: I will watch an episode of my favorite TV show with my friends while my wife and kids are out.

SUPPORT

My support: My coworker Bob will go for a walk with me.

Date	Activity	Total Time	How I Felt
MONDAY	Walking Gardening	5 minutes 20 minutes	It was hard, but it felt good to finish.
TUESDAY	Washing the car	60 minutes	Fantastic! What a gorgeous day to be outside. Car looks great now!
WEDNESDAY	Walking	5 minutes, 2 times each	Went with Bob at work—fun!
THURSDAY	Walking Stretching	8 minutes 15 minutes	A little hard to increase...
FRIDAY	Grocery shopping		Had fun walking through the produce section and picking out fresh fruits and veggies for lunch.
SATURDAY	Walking Stretching	8 minutes 10 minutes	Good way to start the weekend.
SUNDAY	Dancing	20 minutes	Pumped up the music and got moving!

PROGRESS

Did I meet my goals? Why? If I didn't, what will I change next week?

I did meet my short-term goal, but not my long-term goal. There just doesn't seem to be enough time in the day. I will keep working toward it by taking longer walks and asking my wife to help me make and stick to a schedule.

Print out this journal page to keep track of your efforts and improvements.

My Activity Journal

GOALS	My short-term goal: _____ _____ My long-term goal: _____ _____		
REWARD	My reward: _____		
SUPPORT	My support: _____		
Date	Activity	Total Time	How I Felt
MONDAY			
TUESDAY			
WEDNESDAY			
THURSDAY			
FRIDAY			
SATURDAY			
SUNDAY			
PROGRESS	Did I meet my goals? Why? If I didn't, what will I change next week? _____ _____ _____ _____		

Think positive!

Making regular physical activity part of your life is a big step! Start slowly and applaud yourself for every goal you set and achieve.

Be patient. If you cannot achieve your goal the first time or you only stick to the goals for part of the week, remind yourself that this is part of establishing new habits. Review your goals—were they doable? Did you hit a barrier to meeting your goal? Brainstorm some options to overcome it in the future. Reach out to a friend or family member to help support your goals.

Remember to pat yourself on the back for trying, and focus on what you will do differently moving forward. Most importantly, do not give up. Any movement—even for a short time—is a good thing! Remember, each activity you add to your life is another step toward a healthier you.



Resources

Additional Reading from the Weight-control Information Network

The following publications are available online at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications> and also by calling WIN toll-free at 1-877-946-4627.

- ▶ **Changing Your Habits: Steps to Better Health** explains how people can take small steps to become more physically active and consume healthier foods and beverages (available online at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/changing-habits.htm>).
- ▶ **Tips to Help You Get Active** offers tips to help readers become more physically active, overcome barriers to activity, and stay motivated (available online at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/tips.htm>).
- ▶ **Walking...A Step in the Right Direction** explains how to start a walking program, presents a sample program, and shows stretches for warming up and cooling down (available online at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/walking.htm>).



Additional Resources

2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

<http://www.health.gov/paguidelines>

ChooseMyPlate

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010

USDA and HHS

<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines>

Go4Life

National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health

<http://go4life.nia.nih.gov>

National Diabetes Education Program

<http://www.yourdiabetesinfo.org>

National Kidney Disease Education Program

<http://nkdep.nih.gov>

SuperTracker

USDA

<http://www.supertracker.usda.gov>

Inclusion of resources is for information only and does not imply endorsement by NIDDK or WIN.

Why should I participate in clinical trials?

Clinical trials are research studies involving people. Clinical trials look at safe and effective new ways to prevent, detect, or treat disease. Researchers also use clinical trials to look at other aspects of care, such as improving the quality of life for people with chronic illnesses. To learn more about clinical trials, why they matter, and how to participate, visit the NIH Clinical Research Trials and You website at <http://www.nih.gov/health/clinicaltrials>. For information about current studies, visit <http://www.ClinicalTrials.gov>.

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The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a national information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). WIN provides the general public, health professionals, and the media with science-based, up-to-date, culturally relevant materials and tips. Topics include how to consume healthy foods and beverages, barriers to physical activity, portion control, and eating and physical activity myths. Publications produced by WIN are carefully reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This brochure was also reviewed by Steven Blair, P.E.D., Department of Exercise Science, Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina.

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