



[Home](#) → [Health Topics](#) → Exercise and Physical Fitness

URL of this page: <https://medlineplus.gov/exerciseandphysicalfitness.html>

## Exercise and Physical Fitness

### What are the basics of exercise and physical fitness?

Exercise is anything that gets your body moving. Regular exercise is one of the best things you can do for your health. It has many **benefits** [<https://medlineplus.gov/benefitsofexercise.html>] , including improving your overall health and fitness, and reducing your risk for many chronic (long-term) diseases.

Every physical fitness routine is built on a few simple ideas. These include:

- **Make exercise a habit**, as your body adapts to the type of activity you do most often. Regular practice will help you improve.
- **Build up your activity level slowly** to help you continue to get stronger, faster, or more flexible without pushing too hard all at once.
- **Challenge yourself** by lifting slightly heavier weights, adding a few more minutes to your walk, or increasing your pace.
- **Mix up your workouts** to keep things interesting and help prevent injuries or burnout.
- **Show up regularly**, even for short sessions, to help you continue to make progress.

### What are the different types of exercise?

There are many different types of exercise. Before you start, check with your health care provider, especially if you have trouble moving, balancing, or worry that exercise might not be safe for you.

A few main types of exercise include:

- **Aerobic exercises** such as walking, running, or swimming are sometimes referred to as cardio. This is short for cardiovascular exercise. These exercises increase your breathing and heart rate. They keep your heart, lungs, and circulatory system healthy and improve your overall fitness.
- **Strength, or resistance training, exercises** use weights, resistance bands, or your own body weight to build stronger muscles.
- **Balance exercises**, such as tai chi or standing on one leg, improve your stability and coordination. They may make it easier for you to walk on uneven surfaces and help prevent falls

[<https://medlineplus.gov/falls.html>] .

- **Flexibility exercises**, such as stretching or yoga, help your joints move more easily and improve your posture.

Most people benefit from a combination of these types of exercises. Your provider can help you choose the best type or amount of activity for you based on your fitness level and health.

## How can I fit exercise into my day?

Fitting regular exercise into your daily schedule may seem difficult at first. But you can start slowly and break your exercise time into chunks. Even small amounts of exercise can be helpful. You can work your way up to doing the recommended amount of exercise. **How much exercise you need**

[<https://medlineplus.gov/howmuchexercisedoneed.html>] depends on your age

[<https://medlineplus.gov/exerciseformolderadults.html>] and health.

To get started, you don't need fancy equipment, but having the right tools can make it easier and more fun. There are a variety of places where you can exercise and create a routine that fits your lifestyle. This includes:

- **At home.** Dumbbells, kettlebells, a mat, or resistance bands are versatile and affordable options for strength training and stretching. A treadmill, a stationary bike, or a workout video are a few options for indoor cardio.
- **A fitness center, gym, or health club.** These places offer equipment, classes, and sometimes personal trainers for guidance and support. Ask if you can try the center before you join, and if staff are available to show you how to use the exercise equipment.
- **Outdoors.** Try riding a bike, walking your dog, or exploring local parks and trails. Dress for the weather and **protect yourself from the sun** [<https://medlineplus.gov/sunexposure.html>] . If safety is a concern, choose a well-lit neighborhood, a busy park, or even an indoor shopping mall for your walk.

Include activities that strengthen all parts of your body, especially your core, which are the muscles in your abdomen (belly), back, and hips. A strong core helps with **balance**

[<https://medlineplus.gov/balanceproblems.html>] and stability and can lower your risk of **back injuries**

[<https://medlineplus.gov/backinjuries.html>] .




If you haven't exercised in a while [<https://medlineplus.gov/healthrisksofaninactivelifestyle.html>] , start slowly and talk to your provider if you have health concerns. If you don't feel right, or have any pain, **extreme shortness of breath** [<https://medlineplus.gov/breathingproblems.html>] , or **dizziness** [<https://medlineplus.gov/dizzinessandvertigo.html>] , stop exercising and seek help right away.

## How can I stay motivated?

Even with the best intentions, it's easy to fall off track. Here are some ways to keep going:




- **Choose activities you enjoy.** It's easier to make exercise a regular part of your life if you have fun doing it.
- **Exercise safely** [<https://medlineplus.gov/sportssafety.html>] . Use the proper equipment to prevent injuries [<https://medlineplus.gov/sportsinjuries.html>] , listen to your body, and don't overdo it.
- **Give yourself goals.** Your goals should be challenging, but realistic. It may be helpful to reward yourself when you reach them. The rewards could be something big, like new workout gear, or something smaller, such as a new water bottle or movie tickets.
- **Mix it up.** Try a new class, playlist, Podcast, or outdoor route when things get stale.
- **Find an accountability partner.** Exercise with a friend, join a group challenge, or check in with an online community.
- **Use wearable technology.** A pedometer or an app like a fitness tracker on your phone or other device can help you track your progress.


## Start Here

- Eating and Exercise [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/exercise/art-20045506?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
- Fitness Basics [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/basics/fitness-basics/hlv-20049447?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/basics/fitness-basics/hlv-20049447?p=1>]
- Get Active [<https://odphp.health.gov/myhealthfinder/health-conditions/diabetes/get-active>] **Easy-to-Read** (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion)
- Heart-Healthy Living - Aim for a Healthy Weight [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/heart-healthy-living/healthy-weight>]  (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)
- Physical Activity Basics and Your Health [<https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/about/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans: 2nd edition [[https://odphp.health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical\\_Activity\\_Guidelines\\_2nd\\_edition.pdf](https://odphp.health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf)] (Department of Health and Human Services) - **PDF**
- Step It Up! Get Active for Your Health [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2021/07/step-it-up>]  (National Institutes of Health)  
Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/muevase>]
- Tips to Help You Get Active [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/tips-get-active>]  **Easy-to-Read** (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
- Walk. Run. Dance. Play. What's Your Move? - Move Your Way [<https://odphp.health.gov/moveyourway>] (Department of Health and Human Services)


## Related Issues

- Aerobic Exercise: How to Warm up and Cool down [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/exercise/art-20045517?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/exercise/art-20045517?p=1>]

- Dietary Supplements for Exercise and Athletic Performance [<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/ExerciseAndAthleticPerformance-Consumer/>]  
 (National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements)  
Also in Spanish [<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/ExerciseAndAthleticPerformance-DatosEnEspañol/>]
- Exercise and Stress: Get Moving to Manage Stress [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/exercise-and-stress/art-20044469?p=1>]  
(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
- Exercise for Weight Loss: Calories Burned in One Hour [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/weight-loss/in-depth/exercise/art-20050999?p=1>]  
(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/weight-loss/in-depth/exercise/art-20050999?p=1>]
- Exercise for Your Bone Health [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/exercise-your-bone-health>]  
 (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/es/informacion-de-salud/haga-ejercicio-para-tener-huesos-sanos>]
- Exercise Headaches [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/exercise-headaches/symptoms-causes/syc-20372276?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/exercise-headaches/symptoms-causes/syc-20372276?p=1>]
- Exercise Intensity: How to Measure It [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/exercise-intensity/art-20046887?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/exercise-intensity/art-20046887?p=1>]
- Get Active Together: Social Support Can Help Keep You Moving [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2024/05/get-active-together>]  (National Institutes of Health)  
Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/mantenerse-activos-fisicamente-en-comunidad>]
- How Fit Are You? See How You Measure Up [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/fitness/art-20046433?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/fitness/art-20046433?p=1>]
- Overcoming Barriers to Physical Activity [<https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/overcoming-barriers/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Physical Activity and Your Weight and Health [<https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/physical-activity/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Safety Tips for Hot Weather Exercise [<https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/mayoqahot-weather-exercise/>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
- Target Heart Rates Chart [<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/target-heart-rates>] (American Heart Association)
- Travel Plans? Don't Forget to Pack Your Fitness Program [<https://www.massgeneral.org/news/article/vacation-fitness>] (Massachusetts General Hospital)
- When Is the Best Time of Day to Work Out? [<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/when-is-the-best-time-of-day-to-work-out>] (American Heart Association)

- Working Out to Stay Sharp: Can Exercise Keep Your Brain Healthier? [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2025/01/working-out-stay-sharp>]   
Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/hacer-ejercicio-para-mantener-una-mente-agil>]



## Specifics

- Adult Activity: An Overview [<https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/adults.html>]  
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Core Exercises: Why You Should Strengthen Your Core Muscles [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/core-exercises/art-20044751?p=1>]  
(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/core-exercises/art-20044751?p=1>]
- Interval Training: A Shorter, More Enjoyable Workout? [<https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/interval-training-a-shorter-more-enjoyable-workout>] (Harvard Medical School)
- Staying Active at Any Size [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/staying-active-at-any-size>]  (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/control-de-peso/como-mantenerse-activo-independientemente-peso>]
- Strength Training: Get Stronger, Leaner, Healthier [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/strength-training/art-20046670?p=1>]  
(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
- Stretching: Focus on Flexibility [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/stretching/art-20047931?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/stretching/art-20047931?p=1>]
- Three Moves for Functional Fitness [<https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/three-moves-for-functional-fitness>] (Harvard Medical School)
- Walking: Trim Your Waistline, Improve Your Health [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/walking/art-20046261?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
- Weight Training: Do's and Don'ts of Proper Technique [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/weight-training/art-20045842?p=1>]  
(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/weight-training/art-20045842?p=1>]

## Health Check Tools

- Exercise Activity Calculator [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/get-active/exercise-counts-calculator.html>] (American Cancer Society)
- MyPlate.gov [<https://www.myplate.gov/>] (Department of Agriculture)
- Target Heart Rate Calculator [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/get-active/target-heart-rate-calculator.html>] (American Cancer Society)

## Videos and Tutorials

- Epinephrine and exercise [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000051.htm>]  
 (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/anatomyvideos/000051.htm>]
- Weight Management: Strength Training Exercises [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/strength-training-vd.html>]  (Nemours Foundation)



## Test Your Knowledge

- Fitness Facts & Fiction Quiz [[https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/001941\\_45.htm](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/001941_45.htm)] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [[https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/001941\\_100.htm](https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/001941_100.htm)]

## Statistics and Research

- Data and Statistics for Physical Activity [<https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity/php/data/>]  
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- FastStats: Exercise or Physical Activity [<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/exercise.htm>]  
(National Center for Health Statistics)

## Clinical Trials


- ClinicalTrials.gov: Exercise [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Exercise%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Physical Fitness [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Physical+Fitness%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

## Journal Articles



### References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Exercise FITT-V in pregnancy with obesity: Preliminary findings for infant adiposity... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/41663329>]
- Article: A multicomponent intervention consisting of exercise, proteins and omega-3 supplementation to... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/41632571>]
- Article: Effects of Using a Smartphone App Combined With Behavior Change Techniques... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/41616115>]
- Exercise and Physical Fitness -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Exercise%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+OR+%22Physical+Fitness%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

## Reference Desk

- Definitions of Health Terms: Fitness [<https://medlineplus.gov/definitions/fitnessdefinitions.html>]  
 (National Library of Medicine)

## Find an Expert

- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>] 
- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/>]   
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/es/portal-en-espanol>]
- President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition [<https://odphp.health.gov/pcsfm>]  
(Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion)

## Women

- Fitness: All Guides [<https://youngwomenshealth.org/fitness-all-guides/>] (Boston Children's Hospital)
- Getting Active [<https://womenshealth.gov/getting-active>]  
(Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health)  
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.womenshealth.gov/getting-active>]

## Patient Handouts

- Are you getting too much exercise? [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000807.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000807.htm>]
- Dance your way to fitness [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000809.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000809.htm>]
- Exercise clothing and shoes [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000817.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000817.htm>]
- Exercise, lifestyle, and your bones [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000492.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000492.htm>]
- Exercises to help prevent falls [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000493.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000493.htm>]
- Exercising on a budget [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000762.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000762.htm>]
- Give your heart a workout [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000763.htm>]



(Medical Encyclopedia)

Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000763.htm>]

- **How to avoid exercise injuries** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000859.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000859.htm>]
- **How to avoid overheating during exercise** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000865.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000865.htm>]
- **Indoor fitness routine** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000890.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000890.htm>]
- **Learn to love exercise** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000764.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000764.htm>]
- **Make time to move** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000765.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000765.htm>]
- **Outdoor fitness routine** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000891.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000891.htm>]
- **Physical activity** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001941.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001941.htm>]
- **Working with a personal trainer** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000875.htm>]  
(Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000875.htm>]





Are you getting too much exercise? [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000807.htm>]

Dance your way to fitness [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000809.htm>]

Epinephrine and exercise [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000051.htm>]

Exercise clothing and shoes [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000817.htm>]

Exercise, lifestyle, and your bones [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000492.htm>]

Exercises to help prevent falls [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000493.htm>]

Exercising on a budget [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000762.htm>]

Give your heart a workout [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000763.htm>]

How to avoid exercise injuries [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000859.htm>]

How to avoid overheating during exercise  
[<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000865.htm>]

Indoor fitness routine [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000890.htm>]

Learn to love exercise [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000764.htm>]

Make time to move [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000765.htm>]

Outdoor fitness routine [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000891.htm>]

Physical activity [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001941.htm>]

Working with a personal trainer [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000875.htm>]

Yoga for health [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000876.htm>]

## Related Health Topics

Benefits of Exercise [<https://medlineplus.gov/benefitsofexercise.html>]

Exercise for Children [<https://medlineplus.gov/exerciseforchildren.html>]

Exercise for Older Adults [<https://medlineplus.gov/exerciseforolderadults.html>]

Health Risks of an Inactive Lifestyle [<https://medlineplus.gov/healthrisksofaninactivelifestyle.html>]

How Much Exercise Do I Need? [<https://medlineplus.gov/howmuchexercisedoineed.html>]

Sports Fitness [<https://medlineplus.gov/sportsfitness.html>]

4 Physical Activity Tips for Older Adults [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/4-physical-activity-tips-for-older-adults>]

Cassey Ho is Staying Fit While Loving Herself [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/cassey-ho-is-staying-fit-while-loving-herself>]

Keep it Going! How to Stick with a Fitness Routine [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/keep-it-going-how-to-stick-with-a-fitness-routine>]

Personal Story: Sara Santiago [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/personal-story-sara-santiago>]

Retired NFL Star DeMarcus Ware Is in the Best Shape of His Life  
[<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/retired-nfl-star-demarcus-ware-is-in-the-best-shape-of-his-life>]

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