

How much exercise should I get?

Guidelines from the American Heart Association, the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, and various government agencies recommend a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (e.g., brisk walking) on most, preferably all, days of the week.¹⁻³ You can do this in three 10-minute or two 15- minute bouts, if you prefer.

What is moderate intensity physical activity?

Moderate intensity means activities that make you breathe a little deeper, but don't leave you out of breath – you should be able to carry on a conversation. Brisk walking is an example of a moderate intensity activity. Exercise intensity is measured in metabolic equivalents or METs. One MET is the amount of effort it takes to sit quietly. Activities that take 4 to 6 METs are moderate; anything requiring more than 6 METs is considered vigorous. For examples of activities and the energy they burn see [How many calories will I burn in an hour doing various activities?](#) An activity that is vigorous for one person may be moderate for another depending on your age and fitness level. Whatever activities you choose, go at your own pace.

Are women active enough?

No. Women are less likely to exercise regularly than men, and when women do work out, they exercise less vigorously than men.⁴ Almost 26% of women and 21% of men report no leisure-time physical activity; the numbers are even higher in some minority groups (see table below).⁵ About 30% of US women are physically active on a regular basis versus 32% of men.⁶ During adolescence, girls, particularly black girls, tend to cut back on the amount of exercise they get.⁷

Americans Who Report No Leisure-time Physical Activity ^{5, 8}	
American Adults	24%
American women	26%
Women by Race	
White	22%

African American	34%
Hispanic/Latino	40%
American Indian/Alaska Native	32%
Asian/Pacific Islander	24%

What's the difference between physical activity, exercise, and fitness?

We tend to think of exercise as a trip to the gym or laps in the pool, but other types of physical activity such as gardening, household chores, or walking for leisure count for heart health, too. Think of exercise and physical activity as the same thing. Physical fitness includes:

- *Cardiorespiratory fitness* or aerobic fitness: a measure of your body's ability to supply fuel during physical activity. A good indicator is how far and how fast you can walk or run on a treadmill before getting winded.
- *Muscle strength*: a measure of the muscle's ability to exert force during activity. Muscle strength is developed through resistance exercises using weights or gravity, such as lifting weights or rapidly taking the stairs.
- *Muscle endurance* is the ability of the muscle to perform without tiring. Repetition helps build endurance when doing exercises such as weight lifting, push-ups, or sit-ups.
- *Body composition*: the relative amount of lean mass (muscle, bones, vital tissues, and organs) and fat. How lean you are is a better indicator of your fitness and health than how much you weigh. Skin fold tests (how much skin can you pinch) give an indication of your body composition.
- *Flexibility* refers to the range of motion around joints. To improve flexibility, try activities that lengthen muscles such as swimming, yoga, or stretching.

Studies looking at fitness and heart health usually focus on aerobic fitness. Aerobic fitness is partly set by genetics (about 10-25%);⁹ however, the more active you are, the more fit you will become.

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