

## How much physical activity do older adults need?

### Physical Activity is Essential to Healthy Aging


As an older adult, regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health. It can prevent many of the health problems that seem to come with age. It also helps your muscles grow stronger so you can keep doing your day-to-day activities without becoming dependent on others.

Not doing any physical activity can be bad for you, no matter your age or health condition. Keep in mind, some physical activity is better than none at all. Your health benefits will also increase with the more physical activity that you do.


If you're 65 years of age or older, are generally fit, and have no limiting health conditions you can follow the guidelines listed below.

#### For Important Health Benefits



Older adults need at least:

 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of **moderate-intensity aerobic activity** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) (i.e., brisk walking) every week **and** **muscle-strengthening activities** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

OR

 1 hour and 15 minutes (75 minutes) of **vigorous-intensity aerobic activity** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) (i.e., jogging or running) every week **and** **muscle-strengthening activities** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

OR

  An equivalent mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity **aerobic activity** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) **and** **muscle-strengthening activities** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

Need more help with the guidelines?

**Watch this video:**




(<http://streaming.cdc.gov/vod.php?id=faa9d80d8cbf4237dde33008ad0e58a02011024101218945>)  
Windows Media Player, 4:43  
**More videos** (</physicalactivity/everyone/videos/index.html>)

### 10 minutes at a time is fine


We know 150 minutes each week sounds like a lot of time, but it's not. That's 2 hours and 30 minutes, about the same amount of time you might spend watching a movie. The good news is that you can spread your activity out during the week, so you don't have to do it all at once. You can even break it up into smaller chunks of time during the day. It's about what works best for you, as long as you're doing physical activity at a moderate or vigorous effort for at least 10 minutes at a time.

#### For Even Greater Health Benefits

Older adults should increase their activity to:

 5 hours (300 minutes) each week of **moderate-intensity aerobic activity** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) **and** **muscle-strengthening activities** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

OR

 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) each week of **vigorous-intensity aerobic activity** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) **and**

**More time equals more health benefits**  
If you go beyond 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity, or 150 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity activity, you'll gain even more health benefits.



**muscle-strengthening activities** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

OR



An equivalent mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity **aerobic activity** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) and



**muscle-strengthening activities** (</physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>) on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

## Aerobic activity – what counts?

Aerobic activity or "cardio" gets you breathing harder and your heart beating faster. From pushing a lawn mower, to taking a dance class, to biking to the store – all types of activities count. As long as you're doing them at a moderate or vigorous intensity for at least 10 minutes at a time. Even something as simple as walking is a great way to get the aerobic activity you need, as long as it's at a moderately intense pace.

**Intensity** is how hard your body is working during aerobic activity.

**How do you know if you're doing moderate or vigorous aerobic activity?**

On a 10-point scale, where sitting is 0 and working as hard as you can is 10, moderate-intensity aerobic activity is a 5 or 6. It will make you breathe harder and your heart beat faster. You'll also notice that you'll be able to talk, but not sing the words to your favorite song.

**Vigorous-intensity activity** is a 7 or 8 on this scale. Your heart rate will increase quite a bit and you'll be breathing hard enough so that you won't be able to say more than a few words without stopping to catch your breath.



You can do moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic activity, or a mix of the two each week.

**Intensity** is how hard your body is working during aerobic activity. A rule of thumb is that 1 minute of vigorous-intensity activity is about the same as 2 minutes of moderate-intensity activity.

Everyone's fitness level is different. This means that walking may feel like a moderately intense activity to you, but for others, it may feel vigorous. It all depends on you – the shape you're in, what you feel comfortable doing, and your health condition. What's important is that you do physical activities that are right for you and your abilities.

## Muscle-strengthening activities – what counts?

Besides aerobic activity, you need to do things to make your muscles stronger at least 2 days a week. These types of activities will help keep you from losing muscle as you get older.

To gain health benefits, muscle-strengthening activities need to be done to the point where it's hard for you to do another repetition without help. A repetition is one complete movement of an activity, like lifting a weight or doing one sit-up. Try to do 8–12 repetitions per activity that count as 1 set. Try to do at least 1 set of muscle-strengthening activities, but to gain even more benefits, do 2 or 3 sets.



There are many ways you can strengthen your muscles, whether it's at home or the gym. The activities you choose should work all the major muscle groups of your body (legs, hips, back, chest, abdomen, shoulders, and arms). You may want to try:

1. Lifting weights
2. Working with resistance bands
3. Doing exercises that use your body weight for resistance (push ups, sit ups)
4. Heavy gardening (digging, shoveling)
5. Yoga

For more help with what counts as aerobic activity, **[watch this video:](#)**



(<http://streaming.cdc.gov/vod.php?id=e6e0389dc5b>)  
Windows Media Player, 4:48

**[More videos](#)**  
(</physicalactivity/everyone/videos/index.html>)

For more information about strength training, visit **[Growing Stronger: Strength Training for Older Adults](#)**  
(</physicalactivity/growingstronger/index.html>)

## Tips on Getting Active

### **Making Physical Activity a Part of an Older Adult's Life** (</physicalactivity/everyone/getactive/olderadults.html>)

If you're thinking, "How can I meet the guidelines each week?" don't worry. You'll be surprised by the variety of activities you have to choose from.

### Here's what two different older adults are doing to meet the Guidelines:



**David, Age 65** (</physicalactivity/everyone/success/david.html>) "I have been able to control my diabetes with diet and exercise rather than insulin."




**Harold, Age 67** (</physicalactivity/everyone/success/harold.html>) "If you are patient and disciplined, you can be stronger than you were 10 years ago."

## Related Information

**Growing Stronger: Strength Training for Older Adults** (</physicalactivity/growingstronger/index.html>) is an exercise program based upon scientific research involving strengthening exercises—exercises that have been shown to increase the strength of your muscles, maintain the integrity of your bones, and improve your balance, coordination, and mobility.



(<http://go4life.nia.nih.gov/>)  (<http://www.cdc.gov/Other/disclaimer.html>) from the National Institute on Aging (NIH), is designed to help you fit exercise and physical activity into your daily life.

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