

How to Start Being Physically Active

By Chaya Gordon, MPH

- **Taking that first step is hard, but it will get easier**
 - Get some social support from an activity buddy, family member, or others in a group activity
 - Give yourself positive messages (congratulate yourself!) and appropriate rewards
 - Before you know it, physical activity will be a routine part of your day
- **Start slowly**
 - Start with 5-10 minutes of physical activity and build up over time to 30 minutes a day
 - Set goals that you can reach on the way to your long-term goals so you can feel good about your progress and not get discouraged
 - Get a good pair of supportive shoes to wear when you do physical activity
- **There is no right way or wrong way**
 - Figure out your preferences
 - For example, one elder may enjoy being outside while another prefers to be physically active inside.
 - Your personal likes and dislikes will help you decide what to do, when to do it, where to do it, and who to do it with
 - Try new things
 - Keep doing what you like
- **Just 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity a day – a brisk walk, for example – will provide health benefits**
 - You can break up the 30 minutes into 10-minute parts and do a part in the morning, afternoon and evening

- Start with one 10-minute part and add another 10-minute part when you're ready
- Walking is the most popular physical activity
 - Take a walk with your grandchild, friend or dog
- Recreational sports or dancing may be fun for you
- You may also like yard work (digging, raking, hoeing, pruning), washing the car, vacuuming, or other activities around the house as long as you do them with moderate intensity, about the same as taking a brisk walk
 - If you can talk easily, increase your speed or do the activity longer
 - If you are out of breath and it is hard to talk, slow down or do less
- If you like being physically active in a fitness center environment, find a facility that is elder-friendly

- **Over time make sure your routine includes strength, stretching, balance and endurance activities**

- **Listen to your body**
 - Be open to new experiences but respect messages from your body (to slow down, for example)
 - You may like physical activities that have a mind-body connection such as Tai Chi or yoga

- **Most older adults feel better when they're physically active**
 - Check with your healthcare provider before starting to be physically active if you have a chronic condition (high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, etc.)
 - Your muscles may be a little sore the day after doing physical activity, but it shouldn't hurt (if it hurts, stop and see your healthcare provider)
 - Strength exercises can make your joints work better and reduce the pain of arthritis
 - The human body was meant to move. Relax and enjoy yourself!