

**Q.** How much exercise do I really need?

**A.** Probably more than you're getting now. It might be hard to hear, but it's true.

More than 80 percent of all adults in the U.S. don't get enough exercise. And that's a problem.

If you don't exercise, your muscles, bones, and heart get weaker over time. Lack of exercise can lead to weight gain, too. But the long-term effect of poor exercise habits is a lot more serious than clothes that don't fit.

People who don't exercise regularly have a higher risk for:

- Cancer
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Osteoporosis
- Obesity
- Early death

One recent study looked at the link between exercise and long life. Researchers tracked 4,000 people for 9 years. They found that those who got very little, if any, exercise were four times more likely to die early than those who exercised 60 minutes or more a day.

**Aim for 30 Minutes a Day or More**

Take an honest look at your exercise habits. How many minutes a day/week do you exercise? If you get at least 30 minutes of exercise a day, keep it up. If you don't, there's room for improvement.



Regular exercise makes the heart, arteries, bones, and muscles stronger. It helps your body turn food into energy faster. And it leads to good health. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) says you should get at least:

- **30 minutes of moderate exercise** (like brisk walking) on five or more days a week. If you're short on time, aim for 20 to 30 minutes of vigorous exercise (like jogging or running) three times a week.
- **Muscle-strengthening exercises** (e.g., squats, push-ups, curl-ups, pull-ups, etc.) on at least two days a week.
- **Stretching exercises** at least 2-3 times weekly, for people age 55 and older.

**More Exercise, More Health Benefits**

The ACSM also points out that it's better to get more exercise than the minimum amount. You'll have greater health benefits. One recent study found that people who were active 60 minutes a day cut their risk for heart failure by 20 percent.

**Ways to Get More Exercise**

The first rule of fitness, if you're out of shape: Don't overdo it. If you overwork your muscles, they can get sore or injured. It hurts – and you probably won't want to continue regular activity. Start gradually, and increase your level of exercise over time. Here are some ways to get more exercise:

- **Choose activities that you enjoy** doing (e.g., walk, bike, jog, swim, paddle).
- **Get a friend or family member to join you.** Social support is very helpful to stick to an exercise schedule.
- **Set goals,** keep daily records, track your progress, and reward yourself for reaching your goals.
- **Use a fitness tracking device,** mobile app, or pedometer. It's a proven way to help you reach your fitness goals. It helps you stay motivated.

*Sources:*  
 American College of Sports Medicine.  
 American Heart Association.  
 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.  
 Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise.