

All About Physical Activity for People with Diabetes

Toolkit No. 12

Why is physical activity important for people with diabetes?

Here's what physical activity can do for you:

- It lowers your blood glucose (sugar), blood pressure, and cholesterol.
- It lowers your risk for heart disease and stroke.
- It relieves stress.
- It helps insulin work better.
- It strengthens your heart, muscles, and bones.
- It improves your blood circulation and tones your muscles.
- It keeps your body and your joints flexible.

Even if you've never exercised before, you can find ways to add physical activity to your day. You'll experience benefits even if your activities aren't strenuous. **Once physical activity is a part of your routine, you'll wonder how you did without it.**

If I haven't been very active lately, what should I do first?

Start with a checkup—your health care provider will check your heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys, feet, and nervous system. If the tests show signs of disease, your provider can recommend physical activities that will help you but won't make your condition worse.

For more information about making physical activity a part of your routine, ask your health care team for a copy of Toolkit No. 14: *Learning How to Change Habits*.



Find an activity you enjoy, such as a dance aerobics class.

What kinds of physical activity are best?

A comprehensive physical activity routine includes four kinds of activities:

- being active throughout the day
- aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, swimming, or dancing
- strength training, such as lifting light weights
- flexibility exercises, such as stretching

Being active throughout the day

Being active helps burn calories. Place a check mark next to the things you'd like to try:

- Walk instead of drive whenever possible.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Walk around while I talk on the phone.
- Work in the garden, rake leaves, or wash the car.
- Play with the kids.
- Carry things upstairs in two trips instead of one.

- Park at the far end of the shopping center lot and walk to the store.
- Others things I can do: _____

Aerobic exercise

Aerobic exercise makes your heart and bones strong, relieves stress, helps your insulin work better, and improves blood circulation. In addition, it cuts your risk for heart disease by lowering your blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels. For most people, it's best to aim for a total of about 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week. If you haven't been very active recently, you can start out with 5 or 10 minutes a day and work up to more time each week. Or split up your activity for the day—try a brisk 10-minute walk after each meal. Your health care team can show you how to warm up and stretch before aerobic exercise and how to cool down afterward.

Here are some examples of aerobic exercise:

- Take a brisk walk every day.
- Go dancing or take a dance aerobics class.
- Swim or do water aerobic exercises.
- Take a bicycle ride outdoors or use a stationary bicycle indoors.

My plan for aerobic exercise:

What I'll do: _____

What I need to get ready: _____

Which days and times: _____

How long each session will be: _____

How I'll warm up and cool down for each session: _____

Strength training

Strength training helps build strong bones and muscles and makes everyday chores like carrying groceries easier for you. With more muscle, you burn more calories, even at rest. Do your strengthening routine several times a week. Here are some ways to do strength training:

- Lift light weights at home.
- Join a class to do strength training with weights, elastic bands, or plastic tubes.

My plan for strength training:

What I'll do: _____

What I need to get ready: _____

Which days and times: _____

How long each session will be: _____

Flexibility exercises

Flexibility exercises, also called stretching, help keep your joints flexible and reduce your chances of injury during activities. Gentle stretching for 5 to 10 minutes helps your body warm up and get ready for aerobic activities and cool down after your activity. Your health care team can provide information on how to stretch.

My plan for flexibility exercises:

What I'll do: _____

What I need to get ready: _____

Which days and times: _____

How long each session will be: _____

To learn more about how to get started with a physical activity routine, ask your health care team for a copy of Toolkit No. 13: *Getting Started with Physical Activity*.

