Health Benefits of Exercise

Regular exercise can help protect you from heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, noninsulin-dependent diabetes, obesity, back pain, osteoporosis, and can improve your mood and help you to better manage stress.

For the greatest overall health benefits, experts recommend that you do 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic activity three or more times a week and some type of muscle strengthening activity and stretching at least twice a week. However, if you are unable to do this level of activity, you can gain substantial health benefits by accumulating 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity a day, at least five times a week.

If you have been inactive for a while, you may want to start with less strenuous activities such as walking or swimming at a comfortable pace. Beginning at a slow pace will allow you to become physically fit without straining your body. Once you are in better shape, you can gradually do more strenuous activity.

How Physical Activity Impacts Health

Regular physical activity that is performed on most days of the week reduces the risk of developing or dying from some of the leading causes of illness and death in the United States.

- Reduces the risk of dying prematurely.
- Reduces the risk of dying prematurely from heart disease.
- Reduces the risk of developing diabetes.
- Reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure.
- Helps reduce blood pressure in people who already have high blood pressure.
- Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer.
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety.
- Helps control weight.
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
• Helps older adults become stronger and better able to move about without falling.
• Promotes psychological well-being.

Specific Health Benefits of Exercise

Heart Disease and Stroke. Daily physical activity can help prevent heart disease and stroke by strengthening your heart muscle, lowering your blood pressure, raising your high-density lipoprotein (HDL) levels (good cholesterol) and lowering low-density lipoprotein (LDL) levels (bad cholesterol), improving blood flow, and increasing your heart’s working capacity.

High Blood Pressure. Regular physical activity can reduce blood pressure in those with high blood pressure levels. Physical activity also reduces body fatness, which is associated with high blood pressure.

Noninsulin-Dependent Diabetes. By reducing body fatness, physical activity can help to prevent and control this type of diabetes.

Obesity. Physical activity helps to reduce body fat by building or preserving muscle mass and improving the body’s ability to use calories. When physical activity is combined with proper nutrition, it can help control weight and prevent obesity, a major risk factor for many diseases.

Back Pain. By increasing muscle strength and endurance and improving flexibility and posture, regular exercise helps to prevent back pain.

Osteoporosis. Regular weight-bearing exercise promotes bone formation and may prevent many forms of bone loss associated with aging.

Psychological Effects. Regular physical activity can improve your mood and the way you feel about yourself. Researchers also have found that exercise is likely to reduce depression and anxiety and help you to better manage stress.
Millions of Americans suffer from illnesses that can be prevented or improved through regular physical activity.