



Pick Your Path to Health

Getting and Staying Physically Active

We hear it everywhere—from our doctors, the media, family and friends. Exercise, stay active, work out, join a fitness class. The importance of staying physically fit is well-documented and well-publicized, and yet for many women, the thought of adding another task to an already overwhelmingly busy day is just too much. There is good news, though. Dedicating even 15 minutes per day, 3 days per week to physical activity can be a key step to improving your health.

Start Slowly

The great news is that these 15 minutes need not be spent in an arduous, can't-catch-your-breath workout. Cleaning the house, planting bulbs, or briskly walking through the mall are useful ways of breaking into the exercise routine. And when you build up your stamina and are able to continuously maintain these light activities for an hour, you'll lose up to 240 calories, according to the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

As you become more accustomed to physical activity and begin to recognize the benefits to your health, the time you dedicate to exercise and the intensity of the activity will likely increase. At this point, if you spend an hour gardening or walking briskly, you'll burn roughly 370 calories. Not enough? Jogging and swimming burn 580, and running and racquetball burn a cool 740.

But getting started is always a hurdle. "Exercise routines are hard to start and maintain," acknowledges Maria Gomez-Murphy, President of the Way of the Heart: The Promotora Institute. "What we do is try to involve family and friends to support clients in their achievement of wellness goals. We, at the Institute, try to create a supportive atmosphere in our exercise classes—a kind of pseudo family." In such a "family-like" environment, the benefits of exercise extend beyond physical benefits to include social, emotional, and even spiritual support.

Keeping it Interesting

One of the keys to maintaining a consistent workout is actually finding variety in your exercise choices, Gomez-Murphy explains. Walk, bike,

skate, row. The more diverse your workout, the more likely it is that you'll stick to it.

"Our routines are varied and a wide variety of music is used," explains Gomez-Murphy. "Sometimes we have pretty energetic Latin salsa that draws passersby to inquire about our exercise classes. The exercise classes are so successful, we could have classes three times a day, every day, and still be at capacity!"

Remember the Benefits

The benefits of exercise are undeniable. According to The National Women's Health Information Center Web site, those who exercise regularly enjoy advantages such as:

- Reduced risk of heart disease and obesity
- Lower blood pressure
- Diabetes prevention and healthy management
- Healthier bones, muscles, and joints
- Greater likelihood for improved mood and confidence

Consistency is the key, experts emphasize. Commit to a schedule that includes regular exercise—activity at least 3 days per week, every week. Remember, through regular exercise, you can improve your physical, mental, and spiritual well-being and take a giant stride along the path to better health.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."