

EXERCISE TIPS: weight control

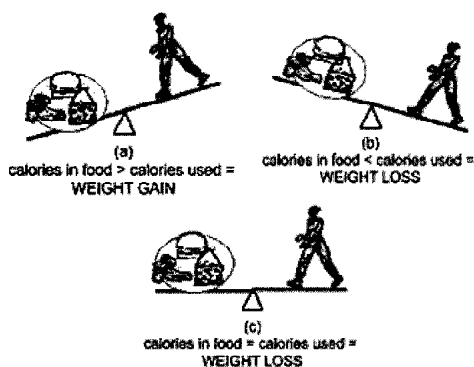
Matt Hulver, University of Kansas

Regular physical activity is an integral part of effective weight loss and weight maintenance. It does not matter what type of activity you perform—sports, planned exercise, household chores, yard work, or work-related tasks—all are beneficial. Studies show that even the most inactive people can gain significant health benefits if they accumulate 30 minutes or more of physical activity per day.

Research has shown that regular physical activity, with healthy eating habits, is the most efficient and healthy way to control your weight. Whether you are trying to lose weight or not, you should understand the importance of physical activity and incorporate it into your lifestyle.

Physical activity helps to control your weight by using excess calories that otherwise would be stored as fat. Regulation of body weight is dependent on the number of calories you eat and use each day. Everything you eat contains calories, and everything you do uses calories, including sleeping, breathing, and digesting food. Any physical activity in addition to what you normally do will use extra calories.

Balancing the calories you use through physical activity with the calories you eat will help you achieve your desired weight. When you eat more calories than you need to perform your day's activities, the body stores the extra calories and you gain weight (a).



When you eat fewer calories than you use, your body uses the stored calories and you lose weight (b). When you eat the same amount of calories as your body uses, your weight stays the same (c).

Any type of physical activity you choose to do—such as running or aerobic dancing or moderate-intensity activities such as walking or household work—will increase the number of calories your body uses. The key to successful weight control and improved overall health is making physical activity a part of your daily routine.

How Much Exercise is Enough?

For the greatest overall health benefits, the American College of Sports Medicine recommends that you do 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic activity three or more times a week and some type of muscle-

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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the winter issue of *ACSM's Fit Society Page*. The turn of the New Year is the time many of us set resolutions to guide us through the coming 12 months. While experts tell us that many resolutions are not kept, this issue of *ACSM's Fit Society Page* is designed to make it easier for those of you who have resolved to get in shape and improve your health keep your pledge. A major concern of people this time of year seems to be losing or controlling body weight. We have devoted this entire issue to deal directly with this pesky issue. The lead article provides numerous helpful exercise tips for weight control, while we have also provided some healthy eating tips to get you through the holiday season of food parties. We have also included a summary of the latest up-to-date information on weight management from the American Dietetic Association's Annual Convention. For those of you thinking about purchasing new home exercise equipment, this issue has some great guidelines to help with your selection. As usual, we have included our Question and Answer section specifically focusing on weight management. We hope you enjoy this issue of *ACSM's Fit Society Page* and find information that you can use to enhance your health and wellness.

If you have any questions or comments please be sure to contact us.

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Q&A with ACSM

Bryan W. Smith, M.D., Ph.D.

Q: How many calories are required to lose one pound of fat?

A: It takes 3500 calories to lose one pound of fat.

Q: What are the usual reasons for being overweight?

A: For a majority of Americans, being overweight is due to improper eating habits (too many calories) and a lack of exercise. However, studies in twins have demonstrated a genetic component with obesity. After the age of 25, an average of one pound is gained per year.

Q: What is a safe amount of weight to lose per week?

A: Weight loss should generally not exceed one to two pounds per week. That's a caloric deficit of 3500 to 7000 calories. The average person consumes between 2000 and 3000 calories per day. This corresponds to a caloric decrease of 500 to 1000 calories per day. Usually, this can

be achieved with simple diet modification such as lowering the amount of fat in the diet to 30-35 percent of calories and reducing the amount of simple sugar intake.

Q: What is a good way to lose weight and keep it off?

A: Behavior modification is associated with more permanent weight loss than diets that emphasize quick weight loss. The body usually reequilibrates water loss that is associated with quick-fix diets. One example of a behavior change would be eating all meals in one location to reduce the amount of snacking.

Q: What is the role of exercise in a weight loss regimen?

A: There are several positive benefits of incorporating exercise in a weight loss plan. First is the obvious caloric expenditure. Aerobic exercise of 50 percent intensity for 30 minutes burns 200-250 calories while aerobic exercise of 75 percent intensity for 30 minutes burns 300-

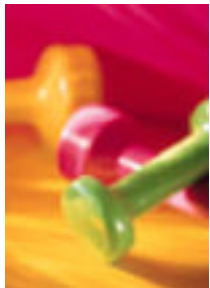
350 calories. Second is a temporary, elevated post-exercise metabolic rate. The longer the duration of exercise or the more intense the activity, the longer the metabolic rate stays increased and more calories are burned. Third, less fat-free body mass is lost. In fact, using resistance training may result in increased fat-free body mass with concomitant loss in fat mass. Fourth, exercise is a mild appetite suppressant.

Q: It seems simple to lose weight by modifying diet and increasing physical activity. Why then are there so many diets out on the market?

A: People want a quick fix and usually don't want to change their lifestyle. Also, people respond differently to the same intervention. No one diet has been proved to be the best.

Q: What should anyone who is considering going on a weight loss program know?

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Commentary

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING HOME EXERCISE EQUIPMENT

Steven J. Keteyian, Ph.D., FACSM and Ilektra Kolokouri, M.Ed.

It is now widely accepted that a moderate amount of daily physical activity can lead to significant health benefits. However, only 22 percent of Americans exercise at a level sufficient to improve health. Common barriers that limit or prevent physical activity include lack of time, concern for safety, inclement weather and limited access to facilities. To overcome some of these barriers, many people have turned to exercise in their homes, and look for the right equipment to achieve fitness and improve health.

Here are a few basic guidelines to follow when shopping for the right piece of home exercise equipment to allow enjoyment of the pleasure and convenience of exercising at home.

1. **Set goals:** What do you want to achieve with exercise? Do you hope to improve aerobic fitness, flexibility or muscle strength?

2. **Set a budget:** How much money are you willing to spend? With respect to home exercise equipment, cost is related to quality and durability.

3. **Think about space:** How much space do you have in your house to accommodate exercise equipment?

4. **Be realistic:** Some of the claims companies make in their advertisements are unrealistic. For example, one common claim is that a machine can burn fat off a particular part of the body, called spot reducing. Can this be true? No. The right combination of diet and exercise will help you burn fat throughout the whole body. Remember, if a claim sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

5. **Shop around:** Always do some comparison shopping before you buy any equipment. Check out consumer articles, advertisements, even visit a fitness center to see what's hot and what's not. Before you decide what to buy, find out the total cost and get all the details on warranties, guarantees, and return policies.

Listed below are several equipment-specific guidelines to consider when making a purchase for your home.

Treadmill:

- Treadmills are an ideal machine that can be used to improve your cardiovascular fitness level.
- If you are an habitual runner or walker, you may need a treadmill that offers a variety of training programs for a more fun and challenging workout.
- Choose a motorized treadmill that has a platform or deck made to absorb a portion of the foot impact. Do not buy a non-motorized unit.
- Check the motor of the treadmill by stomping both feet firmly on the belt while the machine is running. At the same time, listen to be sure there is no groaning, grinding or hesitation in the motor.
- Treadmills can be noisy, so make sure your house or apartment has a room where the noise will not bother others.
- Make sure you have plenty of space for not only the treadmill but also to allow space for you to move comfortably around it.
- Buy a treadmill with a belt length long enough to fit your stride.
- Consider your weight; you may need a sturdier machine with less plastic in the housing.
- For a good treadmill, expect to spend up to \$1000 if you are a walker, and up to \$2000 or more if you are a runner.

Stationary Cycle:

- Stationary cycles offer a low-impact workout ideal for overweight persons and those with a history of low back pain.
- If your goal is to burn calories, consider a dual-action cycle that exercises legs and arms at the same time.
- There are two designs for stationary bicycles: upright and recumbent. The first is like a regular upright bicycle for use outdoors. The second has a bucket-type seat, allowing extension of the legs directly in front while pedaling.
- Before buying a bike, be sure the handlebars and seat can be adjusted to accommodate your height and leg extension.
- Cost may be between \$450 and \$1500.

Stair Stepper/Climber

- This machine offers a low-impact exercise alternative to running. However, the workouts can be tough and demanding.
- Working out at a high resistance on a stair stepper machine can strengthen your thighs and buttocks.
- Avoid purchasing a machine with air-filled shock absorbers. These machines heat up fast and gradually lead to cylinder damage. Machines with hydraulic shock absorbers are preferable.
- Check to be sure that the pedals work in a smooth, quiet and secure manner.
- If you plan to use the machine regularly, make sure you buy one that offers a variety of training options. Different training protocols are usually loaded right into the software provided with the machine.
- Try the machine before you buy it. Make sure it allows you to attain good posture alignment (back upright, knees behind toes).

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Nutrition

'TIS THE SEASON TO EAT WITHIN REASON: TIPS TO AVOID HOLIDAY WEIGHT GAIN

Katherine Beals, Ph.D., R.D.

We've all heard the statistic; the average person gains five to seven pounds over the holiday season. It's almost enough to make you pass up the mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie. Almost. The holidays seem designed to make us gain weight, from the family feasts and food-laden parties, to the gifts of food and drink, to the stress of social gatherings and the pressure to be as happy as everyone else around us seems to be. Indeed, for many people, the holidays are viewed as a time of unavoidable indulgence, and subsequently, unavoidable weight gain. But is it really unavoidable?

The truth is, when it comes to holiday weight gain there is both good news and bad news. The good news is that recent research suggests most of us gain less weight over the holidays than originally thought. The bad news is that the holiday weight gained is rarely lost!

Researchers from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) recently studied the weight change patterns of 195 people over the holiday "season" (*i.e.*, October-March). Subjects were weighed at intervals of six to eight weeks so that weight change could be determined for three distinct time periods: 1) pre-holiday (late September/early October to mid-November); 2) holiday (mid-November to early or mid-January); and 3) post-holiday (early or mid-January to late February or early March). In addition, a final body weight measurement taken approximately a year from the beginning of the study (*i.e.*, the following September/October) was obtained for 165 of the origi-

nal 195 subjects. The researchers found that subjects gained an average of approximately one pound (.48 kg) during the holiday period (*i.e.*, Thanksgiving-New Year's Day), which is significantly less than the oft-cited five to 10 pounds. But, before you breathe a sigh of relief and reach for that extra piece of pumpkin pie, you should know that the weight the subjects gained during the holiday season was still clinging stubbornly to them at the follow-up weigh-in one year later. While the researchers could not pinpoint the exact cause of the holiday weight gain, they did note that subjects who reported being hungrier and less active during the holiday period gained the most weight. The researchers speculated that the annual holiday weight gain, although seemingly small, could add up over the course of several years and may contribute to the "creeping obesity" that commonly plagues adults as they advance in years.

So, what is a health-conscious reveler to do? Well, you can start by being realistic. The holiday season is not a time to lose weight. In fact, it is probably self-defeating, and definitely not in line with the holiday spirit, to try to lose weight during the holidays. Thus, the best strategy is to try to maintain your current weight while still enjoying the bounty of the season. How, you ask? Following the suggestions below is a good way to start!

1. Exercise!

While it is a good idea to balance your energy intake with the appropriate amount of exercise on a regular basis, it is particularly important during the holiday season. Unfortunately, many people use the excuse of a "hectic holiday schedule" to sideline their exercise pro-

gram. This is probably the worst mistake you can make! Recall that the least active participants in the NICHD/NIDDK study were the most likely to gain weight. In addition, according to the National Weight Control Registry (NWCR), a nationwide study of people who have successfully lost weight (at least 30 pounds) and kept it off for an average of five and a half years, a key factor in successful weight loss maintenance is exercise. Thus, maintaining or even increasing your exercise regimen is a good way to allow yourself to indulge in your favorite holiday treats without having to fight the battle of the bulge later on!

2. Think before you eat

When it comes to holiday eating, an ounce of prevention may very well be worth a pound of cure. It may be helpful to devise a holiday eating plan that includes strategies for handling nutritionally precarious situations. Some tried and true strategies include the following:

- If you tend to overeat at parties, try eating a low-calorie snack to help curb your appetite before leaving the house. Chances are if you arrive at the party ravenous, you will overeat.
- Don't vow to eat nothing at a special event. In doing so you will just be setting yourself up for failure and subsequent guilt. Instead, limit your selections to foods you don't typically eat and keep your portion sizes under control.
- If you are invited to a holiday carry-in, take something low in calories and high in nutrition, such as raw vegetables and low-fat dip, sliced fresh fruit, or a low-calorie, low-fat desert.
- A buffet usually spells overindulgence, but it doesn't have to. Make only one trip to the buffet table, and make that

trip count. Survey all the foods at the table and then try small portions of a variety of foods, particularly those that you typically don't consume. Once you have selected your foods, put a good bit of distance between yourself and the table (preferably another room). This will minimize the temptation to go for seconds as well as limit unconscious nibbling.

- When it comes to seconds, use the 20-minute rule. It typically takes 20 minutes after you have eaten for your satiety center to kick in and register that you are full. Thus, before going back for a second helping, wait 20 minutes. If you still feel hungry, go for seconds but keep your portion sizes small and go easy on the high-fat, high-calorie foods.
- If the party is at your house, have disposable containers available for guests to take home leftovers. This will not only get tempting foods out of your house, but also give the guests a little remembrance.

3. Go easy on the alcohol

Most people are well aware of the added poundage that can be brought on by mashed potatoes and gravy or pecan pie. However, few realize that alcohol itself is chock-full of calories. For example, a typical two ounces of alcohol (such as might be found in a typical mixed drink) contains approximately 141 kcal, and that's not including the mixer, which can easily add another 100-300 kcal! An eight-ounce glass of eggnog with rum contains 400 kcal. Even beer and wine packs a calorie wallop at approximately 150 kcal for a typical serving (*i.e.*, 12 and eight ounces, respectively). And research suggests that those additional alcohol calories are preferentially stored as fat as opposed to used for energy. In addition, alcohol tends to distort our nutritional judgment, causing us to consume more high-calorie, high-fat foods than we would if we were not under the influence. Some suggested non-alcoholic beverages include club soda with lime, a non-alcoholic bloody Mary, or diet soda.

No one can deny that food is a big part

of the holidays, but it is not the only part, and certainly is not the most important. So, this holiday season, try to focus on and enjoy the other aspects of the holidays, such as being among family and friends, giving and receiving gifts, putting up holiday decorations, and the spiritual aspects of the season. And, when it comes to food, forget the all or nothing mindset. Depriving yourself of holiday treats or feeling guilty after eating them isn't part of a healthy eating strategy, and it certainly isn't part of the holiday spirit!

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The Athlete's Kitchen



WEIGHT MANAGEMENT UPDATE: NEWS FROM THE AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL CONVENTION

Nancy Clark, M.S., R.D., FACSM

Weight management is a big issue for many active people. At The American Dietetic Association's Food and Nutrition Conference (held in Denver this year) several ADA members presented research that applies to weight management for active people. Here are some of the highlights from the meeting.

Healthy Dinners

A Restaurant and Institutions' survey reports about 70 percent of the population doesn't plan dinner until 4:00 PM or later most days. This is bad news for the many athletes who exercise after work, have not planned dinner, and arrive home too hungry to cook a good meal. The result: super-size portions of fast (and fatty) foods, a lack of vegetables, and an eating pattern that can lead to weight gain.

One solution: The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster Country has a website that provides information about making healthful food in a hurry. The program, "Cook It Quick" (www.lanco.unl.edu/food) can help you get organized, plan meals in advance, and perhaps improve your evening food intake.

Fad Diets

The Zone Diet is not more effective than a typical weight-reducing diet in promoting weight and body fat loss. A Ball State University study compared the dieting success of two groups of overweight women who were assigned to either a 40-30-30 (C-P-F) Zone Diet or a 60-15-25 traditional reduced-calorie diet for six weeks. Both groups demonstrated similar results with losing body fat.

The bottom line: Total calorie intake, not

type of calories, is the important factor determining weight and fat loss. The Zone simply offers a confusing program that helps dieters create a calorie deficit. A higher carbohydrate intake would better fuel muscles.

Body Composition

Many active people are curious about their body fat and wonder what percent of their weight is superfluous. They also may wonder about the accuracy of the currently available methods to measure body fat.

A study from Indiana University of Pennsylvania compared body fat measurements among 30 female college athletes. Their fat was calculated by: skinfold measurements, hand-to-foot bioelectrical impedance (BIA), foot-to-foot BIA (such as the Tanita scale), Futrex (one measurement on the arm), and underwater weighing.

When compared with underwater weighing (the "gold standard" for measuring body composition), skinfolds overpredicted body fat by three percent, and that was the most accurate of the methods! Foot-to-foot BIA overestimated fatness by nine percent. (That's certainly enough to upset any athlete!)

The bottom line: If you have your body fat measured, understand that you may get an inaccurate number. The best use of body fat measurements is to compare repeated measurements taken over time, using the same method and measurer. The numbers will accurately reflect the relative changes in fat.

Rather than play a numbers game, why

not focus on how you feel and how well you perform? That's what really matters. Leaner does not necessarily mean better.

The Cost of Thinness

Synchronized figure skating is a quickly growing branch of figure skating. Like ballet and gymnastics, it is an appearance judged sport where leanness is valued. The question arises: What is the cost of being perfectly thin, or being thinner than Nature's design?

A survey of 126 members of the United States Synchronized Skating Team suggests most of the (already lean) skaters expressed interest in losing an average of seven and a half pounds. Their desire for perfect thinness contributed to restricted food intake. Analysis of three-day food records suggests an average intake of only 1550 calories, at least 500 less than might be expected. The resulting diets were below the recommended intake for the overwhelming majority of nutrients.

The bottom line: The cost of being perfectly thin is commonly sub-optimal nutrition. If you, too, are restricting your intake to achieve what you think is the perfect body, be sure to meet with a sports nutritionist who can help you balance thinness with an optimal diet. Otherwise, lack of protein, calories, calcium, and iron may contribute to a plague of injuries and cut short your athletic career.

Amenorrhea/The Female Athlete Triad

Among female athletes, the prevalence of amenorrhea (the absence of three consecutive menstrual cycles per year) can
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be as high as 66 percent. Amenorrhea can be caused by many factors: inadequate nutritional intake, disordered eating, low percentage of body fat, low body weight, high stress, and/or over-training. The effects can be crippling: stress fractures, bone loss, scoliosis, and early osteoporosis.

The combination of 1) menstrual irregularities, 2) disordered eating, and the consequent 3) loss of bone density is termed the female athlete triad. In a study of 30 female distance runners, 28 (93 percent) were affected by at least one component of the triad, and five (17 percent) were affected by all three. Ninety-three percent of the women underconsumed calories (they reported eating 1800 calories, yet

burned 2950 calories), 50 percent reported a history of drastic weight loss methods, 60 percent had menstrual irregularities, and 60 percent had low spinal bone mass.

The bottom line: Female athletes need to understand the health consequences of this abnormality. They also need nutrition education to help them attain a healthful leanness so they can reduce their risk of stress fractures and stay off the injured list.

Eating Disorders

Speaking at a symposium on eating disorders, Jessica Setnick, MS, RD emphasized the value of seeking professional help instead of struggling alone with food. If someone you know is struggling with

an eating disorder, you should encourage him or her to see a registered dietitian (RD) who specializes in management of eating disorders. (The referral network at www.eatright.org can help you find a local RD.) Contrary to popular belief, the RD's job is not to fatten up the clients and make them eat more, but rather to help clients by answering their food and nutrition questions. The RD can provide accurate information that dispels erroneous food beliefs and "legalizes" all foods. For example, Setnick reported that many people believe some foods are bad for them. She clarified that misconception by stating "the only bad foods are those that are moldy or poisonous, or foods to which you are allergic." Good point!

Exercise Equipment

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- The cost for this equipment typically runs between \$600 and \$2000.

Rowing Machine

- Rowing machines offer a good workout for the entire body. You can enjoy a good aerobic workout and at the same time strengthen abdominal and back muscles.
- Look for a rower that uses a flywheel or water wheel to provide resistance.
- Consider the size of the machine. Be sure the space available will accommodate a rowing machine.
- Quality rowers generally run from \$700 to \$1800

Home Gyms for Resistance Training

- Resistance training at home can be accomplished using both-hand weights or mini-gym equipment. The hand weights are either cast iron or Vinyl/Neoprene. The cast iron type cost approximately \$.50 per pound, and the Vinyl/Neoprene hand weights cost \$.80 to \$1 a pound. The Neoprene hand weights chip less than their vinyl counterpart.
- Purchasing a home gym can be somewhat problematic because you are trying to find one piece of equipment that will allow you to satisfactorily perform 10 to 15 different exercises. No one home gym will allow correct performance of all

exercises.

- Look for smoothness of operation, a heavy-gauge steel frame, and pulleys with sealed bearings.
- Expect to pay \$1000 to \$1500 for a quality home gym.

Keep in mind that the purpose of purchasing home exercise equipment is to help you comply with a lifelong physical activity program. Most important, the best piece of home exercise equipment is the one you will still be using and enjoying for years to come. Don't hesitate to talk to your friends or fitness professionals to learn their experience with a variety of home exercise equipment. Check the Federal Trade Commission web site for further assistance.

Q&A

(continued from page 2)

A: It is very important that individuals with pre-existing medical conditions receive medical supervision with any weight loss plan. Special diets that emphasize caloric intakes less than 1200 calories per day may need vitamin and mineral supplementation. This also includes diets that are not

balanced in terms of protein, carbohydrate, and fat such as antifat or anticarbohydrate diets. Athletes in training or competition need to be particularly careful to get adequate amounts of carbohydrates and fluids to support their energy demands and reduce the risk of heat illness.

Q: How about taking "natural" supplements to boost my metabolism?

A: These supplements contain stimulants that can be potentially harmful in sensitive individuals and in persons with heart, blood pressure, or metabolism maladies. For athletes, some of these substances may be banned by the sporting organization they participate under. It's probably best to consult with a physician or nutritionist.

Exercise Tips (continued from page 1)

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.

Increase Your Daily Physical Activity

Moderate-intensity activities include some of the things that may already be a part of your daily or weekly schedule, such as yardwork and housework. These activities can be done in short spurts — 10 minutes here, 10 minutes there. Alone, each activity does not have a great effect on your health, but an accumulation of 30 minutes of activity over the course of the day can result in substantial health benefits. To become more active throughout your day, take advantage of any chance to get up and move around. Here are some examples:

- Take a short walk around the block
- Rake leaves
- Play actively with the kids
- Walk up the stairs instead of taking the elevator
- Mow the lawn
- Take an activity break—get up and stretch or walk around
- Park your car a little farther away from your destination and walk the extra distance

Aerobic Activity

The point is not to make physical activity an unwelcome chore, but to take advantage of the opportunities you have to be active. Aerobic activity is an important

addition to increased daily physical activity. Aerobic exercise is any prolonged activity that makes you breathe hard while using the large muscle groups at a regular, even pace. Aerobic activities help make your heart stronger and more efficient. They also use more calories than normal daily activities. Some examples of aerobic activities include:

- Brisk walking
- Jogging
- Bicycling
- Swimming
- Aerobic dancing
- Racket sports
- Rowing
- Ice or roller skating
- Cross-country or downhill skiing
- Using aerobic equipment (e.g., treadmill, stationary bike)

To achieve health benefits from aerobic activity, you should exercise at a level strenuous enough to raise your heart rate to your target zone. Your target heart rate zone is 50 to 75 percent of your maximum heart rate. To find your target zone, look for the category closest to your age in the chart and read across the line. For example, if you are 45 years old, your target heart rate zone is 88-131 beats per minute.

Age	Target Heart Rate Zone 50-75%	Average Maximum Heart Rate 100%
20-30 years	98-146 beats/min.	195
31-40 years	93-138 beats/min.	185
41-50 years	88-131 beats/min.	175
51-60 years	83-123 beats/min.	165
61+ years	78-116 beats/min	155

To see if you are exercising within your target heart rate zone, count the number of pulse beats at your wrist or neck for 15 seconds, and then multiply by four to get the beats per minute. If you have problems counting your pulse this way, a commercially available heart rate monitor may

help. Your heart should be beating within your target heart rate zone. If your heart is beating faster than your target heart rate, your exercise intensity is too high and you should slow down. If your heart is beating slower than your target heart rate, you should increase your exercise intensity.

When you begin your exercise program, aim for the lower part of your target zone (50 percent). As your fitness level improves, gradually increase to the higher part of your target zone (75 percent). If exercising within your target zone seems too difficult, exercise at an intensity that is comfortable for you. You will discover that, with time, you will feel more comfortable exercising and can slowly increase to your target zone.

Tips for a Safe and Successful Physical Activity Program

- **Start your exercise program slowly to get the most benefits with the fewest risks.** If you have not been exercising, start at a low intensity and as you become more fit, gradually increase the amount of time and the intensity of your activity.
- **Choose activities that you enjoy and that fit your personality and lifestyle.** For example, if you like team sports or group activities, choose things such as soccer or aerobics. If you prefer individual activities, choose things such as swimming or walking. Also, plan your activities for a time of day that suits your personality. If you are a morning person, exercise before you begin the rest of your day's activities. If you have more energy in the evening, plan activities that can be done at the end of the day. You will be more likely to stick to a physical activity program if it is convenient and enjoyable.
- **Exercise regularly.** To gain the most health benefits, it is important to exercise as regularly as possible. Make sure you choose activities that will fit into your schedule.
- **Exercise at a comfortable pace.** For example, while jogging or walking briskly

you should be able to hold a conversation. If you do not feel normal again within 10 minutes following exercise, your exercise intensity is too high. Also, if you have difficulty breathing or feel faint or weak during or after exercise, you are exercising too hard.

- **Vary your activities.** Choose a variety of activities so you don't get bored with any one thing. If you get bored, you are less likely to stick to an exercise program.
- **Challenge yourself.** Set short-term and long-term goals and celebrate every success, no matter how small.
- **Encourage your family or friends to support you and join you in your activity.** If you have children, it is best to build healthy habits when they are young. When parents are active, children are more likely to be active and stay active for the rest of their lives.

Whether your goal is to control your weight or just to feel healthier, becoming physically active is a step in the right direction. Take advantage of the health benefits that regular exercise can offer and make physical activity a part of your lifestyle.

Stay Active to Stop Winter Weight Gain

Cold winter weather may bring the need for extra layers of clothes, but it does not have to bring extra pounds. The cooler temperatures and shorter days leave many people sitting inside, eating too much and exercising too little. People who allow the change of seasons to change their daily activities are at risk for gaining weight. Linda Patterson, extension health and safety specialist at Mississippi State University, said winter weight gain can be a problem for people of all ages. "Anyone who allows their activity level to drop during the winter is in danger of adding extra pounds," Patterson said. "If a reasonably active routine is maintained throughout the year, weight gain should not be a problem."

Weight gain does not have to be an inevitable result of the winter holidays, and there are steps that can be taken to pre-

vent added inches and pounds. Here are some exercise suggestions:

- **Staying motivated.** To keep yourself motivated, focus on what you'll gain if you keep exercising from autumn straight through winter. You'll continue to reap the short- and long-term benefits of exercise. You'll be in better shape come spring, and you'll have a way to burn off those extra calories consumed over the holidays. Exercise, too, can help shake those "winter blues." It can improve your mood, increase your energy level and help you sleep better. Try to set aside 20 to 30 minutes a day for exercise. Treat it as you would an appointment. Schedule time for it and write it on your calendar. For extra motivation, work out with your spouse or a friend.
- **Move indoors.** There are a lot of ways to exercise indoors. This winter, consider:
- **Mall walking.** The hardest part about mall or indoor track walking is getting there, but once there, you may be amazed how quickly you finish your workout. You may even meet new people.
- **Joining a health club.** Find one you're comfortable with. Have someone show you the different equipment. You may find something new to try.
- **Diving in.** Working out in water is easier on the joints than other forms of exercise, so it may be a good choice if you have bad knees. Don't let a fear of deep water keep you from trying a water workout. Most water aerobics classes are taught in the shallow end.
- **Purchasing exercise equipment.** Set the machine in front of a window or read while you work out. Plan your workout around a favorite TV show. If you like biking, buy "rollers" that turn your regular bike into a stationary one. There's no "ideal" piece of exercise equipment. Try to find one that's practical, easy to use and enjoyable.
- **Brave the weather.** Unless your doctor has advised against it, there's usually no reason you can't continue your favorite outdoor activity year-round, provided the

weather isn't extreme. If you walk or jog outdoors, maintain your schedule. Just bundle up. Consider learning a new outdoor sport, such as snowshoeing or cross-country skiing. Or find some outdoor yardwork to do.

- **Be creative.** There are many ways to work in a little exercise here or there. It does not have to be strenuous. Make a workout of cleaning. Or walk the stairs in your home (if possible). Whatever you choose, balance the four main types of exercise — endurance, strength, balance and flexibility. For example, mall walk (for endurance) and lift hand weights (for strength) on alternate days. Try tai chi (for balance and flexibility), and stretch slowly (for flexibility) before and after you exercise. Don't be too hard on yourself if you miss a day. Just get back on schedule as soon as possible.

Tips for outdoor winter exercise if you do brave the weather:

- **Dress appropriately.** Dress in layers. You should be a little cool starting out. You don't want to sweat a lot and become chilled. Most heat loss is through the head - wear a hat. Wear synthetic fabrics that keep moisture away from your skin. Wear brightly colored or reflective clothing so drivers can see you.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.** Even in cold weather you need to drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.
- **Exercise "defensively."** Beware of slippery surfaces. Exercise in daylight, if possible. Anticipate that drivers may not be able to see you or stop quickly.
- **Talk to your doctor.** Some medical conditions make working out in the cold unsafe. Exercising in cold weather can bring on angina (heart-related chest pain). Cold air can also trigger asthma in some people with this condition. Wearing a face mask or scarf over your mouth can help. If you're older or fairly inactive, talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program.