

# Exercising to Lose Weight



The number of overweight and obese adults has seen a big increase over the past 50 years. Average American adults gain about two pounds per year. Increased weight means a larger number of people with Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke. Evidence also links obesity with some cancers.



Purestock/Thinkstock

Regular physical activity plus a balanced diet can help you lose weight and keep it off. Exercise burns calories and reduces body fat. It also lowers your risk of developing the health problems listed above. The most important thing; no matter your weight or weight loss, regular exercise will improve your health.

How much exercise do you need? The most health benefit comes when inactive people become moderately active. Making exercise a regular part of your life can have a major impact on your health. The key is to choose activities you enjoy. Then, you will want to continue until you meet your weight-loss goals.

Evidence suggests both aerobic and muscle-strengthening exercise programs help. So try to do both. If you are just starting out, do more aerobic exercise. Over time, add resistance workouts. Doing both types will bring even more benefits for your weight loss and overall health and fitness.

## Getting Started

- Talk with your doctor before you start an exercise program. Ask about any changes to your medications or any concerns in becoming more active.

- Take all medicines prescribed by your doctor.
- Your body weight changes based on energy you consume and energy you spend. You consume energy as calories when you eat. You spend energy throughout the day during rest and activity.
- For the greatest success, make changes to what you eat, too. Stick to a healthy, calorie-controlled diet.
- Set realistic weight-loss goals. Aim to lose no more than one to two pounds per week.
- Start by exercising on your own. Begin walking or another form of activity that you can integrate into your daily routine.
- Invite others to join you. Exercising together is more fun and increases the chance you will continue. Dogs also make great walking partners!
- Look for programs available in your community. Consider contacting an appropriately credentialed exercise professional\* to help you. All you really need, though, is a good pair of shoes to get started walking.
- Use a pedometer or other activity tracker to monitor your progress. Slowly work toward a goal, like maybe 10,000 steps per day.

## Aerobic Exercise Programs

The American College of Sports Medicine offers these guidelines for losing weight (Pescatello et al., 2013).

- Aim to drop at least five to 10 percent of your initial body weight over a three- to six-month period.
- Make changes to both eating and exercise. Maintaining these changes will create long-term weight loss.
- Try to reduce your current calorie intake by 500 to 1,000 per day.
- Begin a steady increase to at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity physical activity for overall health benefits.
- Consider higher amounts of exercise (300 minutes or more per week) to promote long-term weight control.

The key to losing weight is to add up the amount of exercise you do each day. The energy used to walk a certain distance is the same whether you walk fast or slow. Walking fast means you burn more calories per minute but walk fewer minutes. In the end, you burn the same calories if you walk the same distance at

a slower pace. It just takes more minutes. Therefore, try to add as much distance as you can each day. Follow the FITT principle to design and implement a safe, effective, and enjoyable program. F = frequency, I = intensity, T = time, and T = type.

- Frequency – Be active on most days of the week but at least three to four days. Work up to five days a week.
- Intensity – Exercise at a moderate level. Use the “talk test” to help you monitor. For example, even though you may notice a slight rise in your heart rate and breathing, you should be able to carry on a conversation while walking at a moderate pace. As you walk faster, you will begin to breathe faster and have difficulty talking. At that point, you’ve achieved moderate intensity or “somewhat hard.” Vigorous exercise causes a large rise in heart rate and breathing. At this intensity it would become difficult to talk. Most people would rate this as “hard to very hard.”
- Time – Exercise 30-60 minutes per day. You can do it all at once or break it up into a few sessions of at least 10 minutes each.
- Type – Do rhythmic exercises using the large muscle groups. Try brisk walking, cycling, and swimming. Choose activities you enjoy and will do regularly in your new, more active lifestyle. Add variety depending on the day or the season to keep your program more enjoyable.

The best weight-loss programs last at least six months. After that, follow a weight-maintenance program. Continue with increased physical activity, weight monitoring, and reduced intake of calories. In other words, this becomes your new, healthy lifestyle.

## Aerobic Exercise Cautions

- If you have been inactive for a long time, start with short sessions (10 to 15 minutes). Add five minutes to each session, increasing every two to four weeks. Gradually build up to being active 30 minutes a day for most days of the week.
- If you exercise at a high intensity, you will not be able to exercise for a long time. That means you will use less total energy. Also, you have a higher risk of injury.
- Being overweight can be hard on your joints. Choose activities that minimize your risk of injury. Swimming and water exercise are great alternatives if other activities are uncomfortable. They are also good for hot and humid days.
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after exercise. Be careful not to overdo it! Extra weight makes it easier for the body to overheat.

## Resistance Exercise Programs

If you lose weight, you may lose muscle as well as fat. Evidence suggests that moderate-intensity resistance training helps increase or maintain muscle mass. Resistance training also improves your ability to function and promotes good health. Follow the FITT principal when creating a resistance exercise program, too.

- Frequency – Do resistance training at least two days per week. Plan a day of rest between sessions.
- Intensity – Exercise at a moderate level. If you can lift a weight 10 to 15 times, you’ve achieved moderate intensity. You get to high intensity when you can lift a weight only eight to 10 times. Remember, you aren’t training to be a weight lifter. Your goal is to improve your strength and muscle endurance so your daily activities will be less stressful.
- Time – This will depend on the number of exercises you do.
- Type – Exercise all major muscle groups using either free weights or a machine. There is no difference between the two methods. Don’t belong to a gym or health club? No problem. You can do the same exercises at home using lighter weights, resistance bands, or your body weight as the resistance, like push-ups or sit-ups.

## Resistance Exercise Cautions

- Do not continue to lift a weight when you feel exhausted. The intensity of the last few repetitions will be close to your maximum. Also, the rise in your blood pressure may be too great.
- Avoid holding your breath when lifting. This can cause large changes in blood pressure. That change may increase the risk of passing out or developing abnormal heart rhythms.

Design your exercise program for maximum benefit and minimum risk to your health and physical condition. Consider reaching out to an appropriately credentialed exercise professional\* to work with you and your doctor. Together, you can establish realistic goals and design a safe, effective, and enjoyable program.

For more information, visit [www.exerciseismedicine.org](http://www.exerciseismedicine.org) or e-mail [eim@acsm.org](mailto:eim@acsm.org).

*Pescatello, L., Arena, R., Riebe, D., & Thompson, P. (2013). General Principles of Exercise Prescription. In ACSM's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription (9th ed., pp. 166-177). Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer Health/Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.*

\*A listing of exercise professionals can be found at [www.usreps.org](http://www.usreps.org) and EIM Credentialed professionals can be found through the ACSM ProFinder (<http://bit.ly/1Mq6ldN>).

## Referral Instructions