

# Exercise & Physical Activity Awareness Month

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## Does walking qualify as exercise?

"I don't feel safe cycling on the roads, I hate running, and I can't afford a gym membership or owning my own exercise machine. I could walk, but will that really be beneficial, or just a waste of time?"

I'm glad you asked. While some prefer more vigorous exercise than walking, the good news is that walking can reduce risk factors and improve health for many. A glance at some well-controlled research studies reveals that walking reduces risk of colon cancer, diabetes, early mortality in diabetics, CV disease, weight gain, stroke, hip fracture, and cognitive decline with aging. Not a bad list for an activity so readily available to us all.

But here's the catch- intensity and amount makes a huge difference when it comes to walking. Fast or brisk walking, with significant arm movement is the key. In one major study, CV disease risk was only reduced when walking speed approached 3 mph (20 min/mile) and maximal health benefits were realized when walkers walked faster than 4 mph (15 min/mile). Brisk walkers need to build up to at least 30 minutes (or 1.5-2 miles) per day for optimal health benefits. So, does it qualify? Absolutely! Just be sure you walk like you've got somewhere to go...

## How many calories am I burning?

While the rate of calorie loss with exercise varies from person to person, the following values provide an estimate of the calories an average 154lb. person would burn in an hour doing a given activity.

Activity	Approximate calories/hour for a 154lb. person
Running/jogging (5mph)	590
Bicycling (>10mph)	590
Swimming (slow freestyle laps)	510
Aerobics	480
Walking (4.5mph)	460
Heavy yard work (chopping wood)	440
Weight lifting (vigorous effort)	440
Basketball (vigorous)	440
Hiking	370
Light gardening/yard work	330
Dancing	330
Golf (walking & carrying clubs)	330
Bicycling (<10mph)	290
Walking (3.5mph)	280
Weight lifting (general light effort)	280

Make the hobbies you love part of your exercise routine and you'll be more likely to stick with it!

## Benefits of Exercise

### Short Term:

- More energy
- Increased metabolic rate
- More restful sleep
- Increased attentiveness
- Endorphin increase = improved mood

### Long Term:

- slows the aging process
- improves the quality of life
- do the things you love more and be independent longer
- Reduced risk of: cardiovascular disease, heart disease, some cancers, back problems, osteoporosis, arthritis, diabetes, obesity

As little as 30 minutes of moderately intense cardio activity 5 days a week, or 20 minutes of intense cardio activity 3 days a week will provide these benefits!

## Increasing Activity

**Myth:** You will only achieve health benefits from exercise if you work out vigorously for extended periods of time.

**Reality:** Any level of activity can have a positive effect on your health. Higher levels of exercise *will* provide further results, but the most significant benefits are seen in those who progress from a sedentary lifestyle to any amount of exercise.

**Start small:** The CDC recommends exercising for 30 minutes, 5 days per week, but they also say it's okay to break up your exercise into 10 minute bouts. If 30 minutes seems impossible right now, try adding more activity throughout your day as you strive for 150 minutes of physical activity/week.

### Easy Ways to Your Increase Activity Level

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Join a group exercise class
- Take your dog for a walk
- Work on your gardens
- Go for a walk in the park with your spouse
- Park your car farther away from your destination
- Try walking or biking to work
- Sign up for a behavior change program through the employee wellness program

<http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/index.html>; Manson et al. (2002) NEJM, 347: 716-725; Colditz et al. (1997) CCC 8:649-667; Gregg et al. (2003) AIM 163: 1440-1447; <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/pdf/DGA2005.pdf>