

How Much Physical Activity Do Older Adults Need?

Most people know that physical activity is important. In fact, not getting enough has been linked to illnesses like heart disease, stroke, diabetes, Alzheimer's, high blood pressure and lung disease. So, the important question is not if you need to be doing some form of physical activity to protect against diseases like these, but how much is enough?

The US Department of Health and Human Services answered that question for us in 2008 with their recommendations for physical activity. To improve or maintain health, adults over 65 need to do 2 types of physical activity: aerobic exercise and strengthening.

Aerobic Exercise

To meet the recommendations for aerobic exercise you should try to be active daily and perform your aerobic activity for at least 10 minutes at a time. Each week you should aim for

- 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity
- OR**
- 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity.

The general rule is that 1 minute of vigorous activity is equal to 2 minutes of moderate intensity activity, so a combination of moderate and vigorous activity can also be used to satisfy the recommended 150 minutes each week.

Some examples of moderate intensity aerobic activity that can be done during the current COVID-19 crises:

- Walking
- Riding a bike on a level surface
- Gardening

Vigorous intensity activities include:

- Running or jogging
- Riding a bike fast, or on hills
- Singles tennis
- Hiking uphill

Strengthening

Muscle strength is important for all daily movement, and in older adults it can help to maintain strong bones, as well as reduce the risk of falling. **The recommendation for strengthening is to work each major muscle group twice a week.**

Examples of strengthening activities include:

- Carrying heavy loads
- Lifting weights
- Exercises using your own body weight like push-ups, sit ups, or squats

For each exercise you should try to perform:

- At least one set
- 8 to 12 repetitions in each set

Your resistance should be heavy enough that the last repetition is hard to complete.

These guidelines are general recommendations and do not consider previous injuries, medical conditions, or limitations that individuals may have. Your physical therapist is an expert in exercise and physical activity who can help design a program to maintain or improve your health while considering your past medical history, limitations, and goals. Your physical therapist can teach you safe exercise technique, and help you safely progress your program as you get fitter to continue making improvements in your overall health.