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Move It! New Exercise Guidelines

Crystal-Clear Exercise Advice From U.S. Heart, Sports Medicine Groups

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Aug. 8, 2007 -- New exercise guidelines make it crystal clear: To be healthy, you gotta move.

That's more than a Rolling Stones lyric -- it's a minimum requirement for health, says an expert panel from the American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM).

In 1995, the CDC and the ACSM published national exercise guidelines. What happened?

"Physical inactivity remains a pressing public health issue," note Stanford researcher William L. Haskell, PhD, and his fellow panel members. "Data from 2005 indicate that less than half -- 49.1% -- of U.S. adults met the CDC/ACSM physical activity recommendation.

Maybe, Haskell and colleagues suggest, the 1995 message wasn't entirely clear. For example, they suggested exercise on "most, preferably all days of the week." Perhaps this was too confusing.

To erase any uncertainty, the new guidelines spell out what you have to do in graphic detail: To be healthy, you must exercise.

You need two kinds of exercise. The first kind is aerobic exercise -- the move-your-butt kind. That means:

Walk briskly for 30 minutes five days a week, or

Jog for 20 minutes three days a week, or

Mix walking and running. For example, walk briskly for 30 minutes twice a week and jog 20 minutes twice a week.

You can break these activities up into 10-minute segments, but not into smaller segments.

You can substitute other moderate-intensity activities for walking. But you can't count low-level daily activities -- such as walking from the parking lot to the grocery store or taking out the trash -- as exercise.

You can substitute other vigorous-intensity activities for running, as long as your heart rate noticeably goes up and you start to breathe fast.

The second kind of exercise is strength training. This means activities -- such as weight lifting -- that use the major muscles of the body. You should do eight to 10 exercises on two different days at least one day apart. These exercises should result in "substantial fatigue after eight to 12 repetitions of each exercise," the guidelines state.

Here's the bad news: This is just the minimum required for health. More is needed to improve fitness, reduce disease risk, and/or prevent weight gain.

Here's the good news: If you get at least the minimum amount of regular exercise, you significantly cut your risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, colon cancer, breast cancer, anxiety, and depression. And you very likely slow age-related decline of mental function.

The new guidelines appear in the August issue of the ACSM journal *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*.

Want great exercise advice? Visit WebMD expert Rich Weil, MEd, CDE, on his [Exercise and Fitness message board](#).

SOURCE: Haskell, W.L. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, August 2007; vol 39: pp1423-1434.