



Wespath

BENEFITS | INVESTMENTS

a general agency of The United Methodist Church

REIMAGINE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Understanding Physical Activity and Exercise Terms



Physical Activity

By definition this means any body movement during the day. This includes grocery shopping, cleaning, dancing, swimming, yoga and push ups/sit ups. Generally speaking, the more physical activity you do, the better off you will be. You will see improvement in your fitness and potentially your health if you exercise consistently.

Exercise

Exercise is defined as purposeful physical activity with the intent to improve one's health or fitness. This can be going for a brisk walk, participating in group exercise class, completing a series of resistance training exercises, going for a bike ride, swimming, jogging and more.

Exercise Components

There are three primary components of exercise—cardiovascular, strength and flexibility. Each component has a recommended weekly amount. But the three can be combined in many activities. For example, swimming is an excellent cardiovascular workout that builds muscle strength and flexibility—combining components 1, 2 and 3 below.

1 Cardiovascular Exercise

Cardiovascular exercise, or cardio, is designed to increase your heart rate over a prolonged period of time. Examples include jogging, a brisk walk, a bike ride or circuit training session. The kind of cardio that is best for you depends on your goals. If you are a beginner, start with what you can tolerate such as parking farther away from the grocery store entrance or going for a walk around the block. Focus on increasing duration rather than speed. If your goal is to run a 5K, then you should focus on longer distances.

When 30 minutes of physical activity becomes easy, it is time to bump up the intensity by changing the tempo, pumping your arms or walking uphill. While your time may stay at 30 minutes, you will continue to improve your health and fitness by increasing the intensity of the activity without increasing your exercise time. Remember that once you are comfortable exercising at a higher intensity for 30 minutes, you are due to add more time.

Experts recommend a minimum of three cardiovascular workouts per week for a total of about 2.5 hours per week. Each workout should last a minimum of 30 minutes, with a goal of 50 minutes (including warm-up and cool-down). For more information on cardio workouts, check out the resources section of the toolkit.

2 *Strength Training*

Strength training improves muscular fitness as you apply resistance. Examples of strength training include everything from weight machines, dumbbells and barbells, resistance bands, to cans of soup and body weight exercises. Your individual fitness goals and what equipment or tools you have available will help direct your program. You can strength train at the gym using machines or dumbbells; at home with resistance bands, body weight exercises or soup cans. Also, many second-hand stores have quality used equipment for sale.

Experts recommend strength training a minimum of two non-consecutive days per week. Complete 8 to 10 exercises that focus on the larger muscle groups, chest, back, legs and shoulders, with a target of completing 10–15 repetitions. Once you can complete 15 repetitions easily it is time to add more weight and lower the repetitions back to 10.



3 *Flexibility*

Flexibility training, or “stretching,” is the ability of your joints to move freely through a range of motion. It is better and easier to stretch warm muscles so make sure you do some activity before you stretch. Other flexibility options are a yoga or pilates class (check out DVDs from the library or look online). Focus on stretching the larger muscle groups: chest, back, hips, legs and shoulders.

Circuit Training—a fun and time saving way to exercise

A low cost and effective method to increase muscle strength and improve cardiovascular endurance is to engage in a series of calisthenics called circuit training. You can also easily do these while traveling. Perform 20–30 seconds of a particular exercise like jumping jacks, then with a short rest period begin another exercise like push ups. See the circuit training example in this toolkit to get you started. Circuit training challenges both the cardiovascular system and your muscles.

Keeping With Your Exercise Program

All three components contribute to improved physical and mental health. Remember, your physical activity is going to ebb and flow. Some weeks or months you may find it easier to exercise than others. During the busy times or periods where your motivation is low, go easy on yourself. The key is to begin again. This might be the perfect opportunity to try a new activity, join—or start—an exercise group. Something is better than nothing when it comes to exercise, and often when we are really busy is when we need the activity the most—completing even a short activity session can boost the spirit and provide a sense of accomplishment.

For suggestions on cardiovascular exercise, strength training and stretching, please see the toolkit resources.

Consult with your physician prior to beginning an exercise program.

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