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Improve Health Through Physical Activity

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans state that in addition to consuming a healthy eating pattern, regular physical activity is one of the most important things Americans can do to improve their health. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides a comprehensive set of recommendations for Americans on the amounts and types of physical activity needed each day.

Adults need at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity and should perform muscle-strengthening exercises on two or more days each week. Youth ages 6 to 17 years need at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, including aerobic, muscle-strengthening, and bone-strengthening activities.

Just as individuals can achieve a healthy eating pattern in a variety of ways that meet their personal and cultural preferences, they can engage in regular physical activity in a variety of ways throughout the day and by choosing activities they enjoy.

Take a walk through a park, play a pickup game of basketball, go for a bike ride, or just enjoy a game of tag in the backyard are all great ways to spend time as a family and meet those physical activity needs.

Federal resources, including handouts, online assessments, trackers, and interactive websites can be used to help motivate audiences to make healthy physical activity choices.

Children and adolescents should do 60 minutes or more of physical activity daily. Most of the 60 or more minutes a day should be either moderate or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity and should include vigorous-intensity physical activity at least 3 days a week.

As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include muscle-strengthening physical activity on at least three days of the week while bone strengthening physical activity should be the focus of at least three days of the week.

It is important to encourage young people to participate in physical activities that are appropriate for their age, that are enjoyable, and that offer variety.

All adults should avoid inactivity. Some physical activity is better than none, and adults who participate in any amount of physical activity gain some health benefits. For substantial health benefits, adults should do at least 150 minutes each week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes each week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity.

Aerobic activity should be performed in episodes of at least 10 minutes, and preferably, it should be spread throughout the week. For additional and more extensive health benefits, adults should increase their aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity, or 150 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity.

Additional health benefits are gained by engaging in physical activity beyond this amount. Adults should also include muscle-strengthening activities that involve all major muscle groups on two or more days a week.

Adults ages 65 Years & Older should follow the adult guidelines. When older adults cannot meet the adult guidelines, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions will allow. Older adults should do exercises that maintain or improve balance if they are at risk of falling. Older adults should determine their level of effort for physical activity relative to their level of fitness. Older adults with chronic conditions may need to alter their regular physical activity to allow for safety in their activities.

Stay Strong Stay Healthy is a great program provided by the Wildcat Extension District staff that will help adults meet the physical activity needs through weight bearing, balance and strengthening exercises. For more information on a Stay Strong Stay Healthy class near you contact your local Wildcat Extension District Office.

Information about this topic was found in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020 8th Edition.

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