



Beyond the Gym: Adding Physical Activity to Your Daily Routine

Being physically active and becoming fit doesn't have to mean spending hours at the gym. Small changes to your day-to-day activities can contribute to your overall fitness even with a busy schedule.

What is fitness?

Being physically fit means being able to go about your daily activities without getting overly fatigued, and still having the energy to enjoy hobbies or attend to any emergencies that may arise.¹ Fitness is not just about being strong or fast, but is a combination of strength, cardiovascular endurance, and flexibility.²

What can I do to improve my fitness daily?

Regular exercise is an important component of a healthy lifestyle and it is recommended that individuals engage in a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate physical activity a week in order to maintain a healthy weight.³ But exercise is only one way to improve your fitness. The information below goes beyond exercise by offering you tips for incorporating physical activity into your daily routines outside of the gym.

Think Outside the Gym

It is important to consider routine, daily activities as part of your physical fitness routine. When doing so, you will discover new ways of becoming physically active, increase your heart rate, and burn a few extra calories throughout your day. For example:

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park in the furthest spot from the entrance when you are running errands.
- Walk or bike to work if it is safe and feasible.
- Do active household chores, such as:
 - Vacuum and clean your house.
 - Lift groceries out of your car.
 - Plant a garden.
 - Mow the lawn with a push mower.
 - Rake the leaves or shovel snow.



For more ideas on being active (and helping your family become active!) check out [Get Active to Be Healthy](#).

Take Breaks from Sitting

Even if you get the recommended amount of exercise each week, sitting for prolonged periods of time carries health risks. Prolonged sitting can contribute to weight gain which in turn may increase your risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some cancers.⁴ The good news is that regular breaks from prolonged sitting have the potential to help with your overall fitness and alleviate some of the health risks.⁵

Some ways to reduce the amount of time spent sitting include:

- Use a standing desk periodically throughout the day. If you don't have one, you can place your laptop on a cabinet or counter to reach a comfortable height.
- March in place or see how many pushups you can do, during commercial breaks when watching television.
- Walk to your co-worker's desk to talk to them instead of sending an email.
- If you can, set an alert on your calendar or phone to remind you to get up, stretch, and walk around every hour.
- Conduct walking meetings if the topic, location, and leadership allow.
- Perform chair exercises to burn calories while you are at work or at your home computer. See the [Chair Exercises Fact Sheet](#) for examples.

Don't Follow the Path of Least Resistance

Add resistance training (also known as strength training) to your daily routine to increase strength.

- Incorporate weight machines, free weights, or resistance bands into your typical workout regimen.
- Keep a resistance band at your desk. Learn how to [use a resistance band safely](#).
- Your bodyweight can be enough! Squeeze in a few [push-ups, sit-ups, or other muscle strengthening exercises](#) throughout the day.
- [Visit HPRC's Muscular Strength Web page](#) for additional strength training ideas.

Stretch Safely

Flexibility should not be ignored as part of your overall fitness. It prevents injury and improves performance.⁶ However, it is important to do it safely. Research indicates that you should warm up with a brief bout of cardiovascular activity such as jogging or jumping jacks prior to a stretching session.⁷



- If you can't find time to warm up first, you can stretch immediately after a shower, since the shower helps warm the muscles.
- Add five to ten minutes to the end of any workout to allow time to stretch.
- For more ideas to add stretching into your routine, visit the [American Council for Exercise Flexibility Benefits Web page](#).

Additional Resources

[NMCPHC Active Living Web page](#)

[Exercise Programs for Active, Healthy Living \(NMCPHC\)](#)

[Navy Operational Fitness and Fueling System \(NOFFS\)](#)

[Human Performance Resource Center](#)

¹ Glossary of Terms. Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/glossary/>. Updated June 2015. Accessed March 2016.

² Flexibility and Mobility. Human Performance Resource Center. <http://hprc-online.org/physical-fitness/physical-fitness-faqs/flexibility-and-mobility> Accessed March 2016

³ Physical Activity for a Healthy Weight. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/physical_activity/index.html. Updated May 2015. Accessed March 2016.

⁴ Stand Up for Your Health. Human Performance Resource Center. <http://hprc-online.org/blog/stand-up-for-your-health>. Published October 2013. Accessed March 2016.

⁵ Pronk N, Katz A, Lowry M, et al. Reducing Occupational Sitting Time and Improving Worker Health: The Take-a-Stand Project, 2011. *Prev Chronic Dis*. 2012;9(110323). http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2012/11_0323.htm. Accessed March 2016.

⁶ Flexibility and Mobility. Human Performance Resource Center. <http://hprc-online.org/physical-fitness/physical-fitness-faqs/flexibility-and-mobility>. Accessed March 2016.

⁷ Thacker, S, Gilchrist J, Stroup D, et al. The Impact of Stretching on Sports Injury Risk: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Med Sci Sports Exerc*. 2004;36(3):371-378. http://journals.lww.com/acsm-msse/Fulltext/2004/03000/The_Impact_of_Stretching_on_Sports_Injury_Risk_A.4.aspx. Accessed March 2016.