

New Exercise Guidelines Help You Get Fit

Build a foundation for better health with these clearly defined recommendations for overall fitness and strength.

The American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine have issued new guidelines for exercise, including special instructions for those over the age of 65. The recommendations were published in the August 1, 2007 issue of the journal *Circulation*, and replace those that were issued in 1995.

“A special report was written specifically for those over the age of 65 to emphasize the importance of strength, flexibility, and balance,” says William Haskell, PhD, professor of medicine at Sanford University and lead author of the revised guidelines. Following is a summary of the guidelines for two age groups – 65 and older; 64 and younger. The 2007 ACSM – AHA Exercise Guidelines chart provides additional information.

65 AND OVER. The recommendations for adults over 65 and for those between the ages of 50 and 64 who have chronic conditions (such as arthritis), that might restrict activity are slightly different, varying from moderate to intense.

- 1) Moderate-intensity aerobic exercise 30 minutes a day, five days a week, OR intense aerobic exercise 20 minutes a day, three days a week, and 2) Eight-10 strength-training exercises, 10-15 repetitions of each exercise, 2-3 times per week, and 3) Perform balance exercises five days a week.

64 AND UNDER. 1) Moderate intensity cardiovascular exercises 30 minutes a day, five days a week, or more intense cardiovascular activity 20 minutes a day, three days a week, and 2) Eight to 10 strength-training exercises; eight to 12 repetitions of each exercise twice a week.

1995 AND 2007 GUIDELINE DIFFERENCES. One difference between the old and new guidelines is that terms like “moderate intensity” physical activity have been clarified. “For older adults,” explains Dr. Haskell, “moderate-intensity aerobic exercise means working hard at about a level-six intensity on a scale of 10. You should still be able to carry on a conversation during exercise. Starting at about age 60, an example of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise could be walking at a three-miles-per-hour pace. At age 70-75, moderate exercise might be walking at two mile per hour.” More vigorous activities would be walking up stairs or hills, playing singles in tennis, or swimming, which can range in intensity from moderate to vigorous and which can be adjusted for each individual.

The new guidelines also allow for moderate aerobic activity to be broken into 10-minute intervals that total 30 minutes. Those activities can include also gardening, carpentry, and other activities that help you achieve the same results in terms of demands placed on the heart and muscles.

STRENGTH TRAINING. Curls for the upper body and heel raises for the lower body are good starter lifts to increase strength. Use weights between three and eight pounds

and complete and 10-15 repetitions two or three days a week. Add more exercises as you get more comfortable with the idea of strength training.

One of the most practical methods of strength training for older adults is the use of rubber cords or bands. They are inexpensive, safe, and can be purchased at any sporting goods store. They also come with instructions for simple upper and lower-body strength training exercise.

BALANCE TRAINING. For older adults, the ASCM/AHA guidelines stress the importance of stretching and balance activities - stretching for flexibility and balance to prevent falls. Exercise such as standing on one foot while stretching (but standing close enough to hold onto something stable in case you lose your balance) and while resting between other exercises is enough to improve balance. Tai chi also is effective for balance training.

MAKE A PLAN. The new guidelines point out the importance of having a physical activity plan. That means working with your doctor, physical therapist, or a certified trainer to develop a program, giving exercise a reasonable priority in your life, and including aerobic, strength, and flexibility components.

MINIMUM STANDARDS. The report emphasizes that the guidelines are minimum standards. Going beyond those recommendations, with the permission of your doctor, provides even more health benefits.

More is better, but only to a certain point, Dr. Haskell warns. "There is no evidence that exercising longer than 60 minutes per day provides any health benefits. This is when fatigue and overuse injuries occur. Strive for a balanced program, both in time spent exercising, the variety of exercises, and exercise intensity."

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