The Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

Bad habits are hard to break. Good habits can be, too. Regular (daily or at least most days of the week) physical activity is one habit that should be unbreakable if you want to maintain or improve your health.

An article in the June 14, 2000, issue of JAMA reports results from a large study of female nurses that found regular leisure-time physical activity reduced the risk of experiencing a stroke. On average, the more physically active the women were, the greater their reduction in the risk of having a stroke.

If you are starting a new exercise program you should consult with your doctor first. He or she can evaluate you for heart disease or other health problems to see if you should take any extra precautions before you begin.

**LONG-TERM BENEFITS:**
Reduced risk of:
- Dying prematurely
- Dying from heart disease
- Developing diabetes
- Developing high blood pressure
- Becoming obese
- Developing colon cancer

**BEING ACTIVE:**
Choose a variety of activities that you enjoy doing regularly and engage in these at moderate intensity for at least 30 to 60 minutes at least 5 days per week. It is not necessary to exercise all in one session. Several 10- to 15-minute sessions can be just as effective.

**EXERCISE INTENSITY:**
One way to determine how strenuously you are exercising is to see if you can talk while you are exercising. If you can talk easily, you are working at a light to moderate rate - you may want to increase the rate of exercise in order to make it more strenuous. If you become out of breath quickly, you are probably working too hard.

**LENGTH OF EXERCISE SESSION AND INTENSITY:**
Exercise that raises your heart rate is ideal, but exercise does not necessarily need to be strenuous to be beneficial; many activities of daily living such as climbing stairs or walking from the train to your office can provide benefits. If you choose a less vigorous activity, you should spend more time doing that activity. For example, you need a longer session of brisk walking (30 minutes or longer) to experience some of the similar health benefits of a shorter session of a more strenuous exercise like jogging (15 to 20 minutes). Build up to a longer session or more strenuous exercise gradually.

**SHOR T-TERM BENEFITS:**
Short-term benefits from regular physical activity:
- A healthier heart
- Increased endurance
- Healthy muscles, bones, and joints
- Improved burning of calories
- More energy
- Better ability to cope with stress
- A sense of well-being
- Improved ability to fall asleep and sleep well

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**
- American Heart Association
  800/AHA-USA1 or www.americanheart.org
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)
  NHLBI Information Center
  301/592-8573 or www.nhlbi.nih.gov

**EXERCISE:**
- Light Activity:
  Cleaning house, Playing baseball, Playing golf
  Calories Burned Per Hour:
  Man: 300
  Woman: 240
- Moderate Activity:
  Walking briskly (3.5 mph), Gardening, Cycling (5.5 mph), Dancing, Playing basketball
  Calories Burned Per Hour:
  Man: 460
  Woman: 370
- Strenuous Activity:
  Jogging (9 min./mile), Playing football, Swimming
  Calories Burned Per Hour:
  Man: 730
  Woman: 580
- Very Strenuous Activity:
  Running (7 min./mile), Racquetball, Skiing
  Calories Burned Per Hour:
  Man: 920
  Woman: 740

* May vary depending on a variety of factors including environmental conditions.
** Healthy man, 175 pounds; healthy woman, 140 pounds.