



## How Can Physical Activity Become a Way of Life?

If you aren't in the habit of being physically active, you're probably being told you should start. That's because regular physical activity reduces your risk of heart disease and stroke. It also helps you reduce or manage other risk factors — high blood pressure, high cholesterol, excess weight and diabetes.

But the benefits don't stop there. You may look and feel better, become stronger and more flexible, have more energy, and reduce stress and tension.



### How do I start?

- Start slowly — don't overdo it!
- Choose activities you enjoy. Pick a start date that fits your schedule and gives you enough time to begin your program. Walking is a great way to get started!
- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes.
- Try to exercise at the same time each day so it becomes a regular part of your lifestyle.
- Drink water before, during and after each exercise session.
- Use the buddy system! Ask a friend to start a program with you.
- Note the days you exercise and write down the distance or length of time of your workout and how you feel after each session.
- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity, aerobic exercise each week. If you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, aim for at least 40 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity at least 3 to 4 days a week.

- If you miss a day, plan a make-up day.

### What will keep me going?

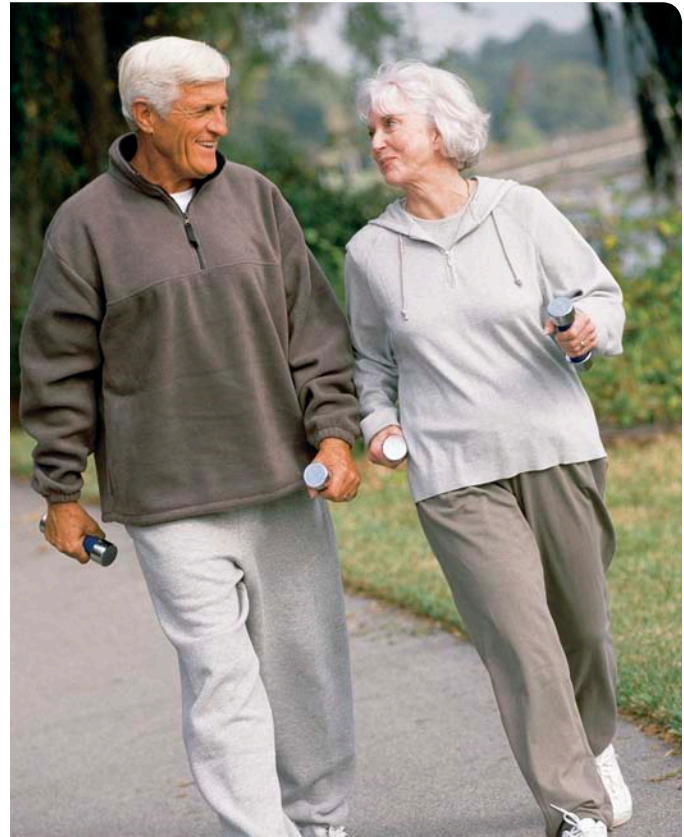
- Get your family into physical activity! It's great to have a support system, and you'll be getting them into an important health habit.
- Join an exercise group, health club or local community center.
- Choose an activity you like and make sure it's convenient for you. If you need good weather, have a back-up plan for bad days (e.g., when it rains, walk in the mall instead of the park).
- Learn a new sport you think you might enjoy, or take lessons to improve at one you know.
- Do a variety of activities. Take a brisk walk one day, a swim the next time. Then go for a bike ride on the weekend!
- Make physical activity a routine so it becomes a habit.
- If you stop for any length of time, don't lose hope! Just get started again and work up to your old pace.

*(continued)*



### What else should I know?

- Try not to compare yourself with others. Your goal should be personal health and fitness.
- Think about whether you like to exercise alone or with other people, outside or inside, what time of day is best, and what kind of exercise you most enjoy doing.
- If you feel like quitting, remind yourself of all the reasons you started. Also think about how far you've come!
- Don't push yourself too hard. You should be able to talk during moderate exercise.



### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

### Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**What kind of shoes should I wear to prevent injury?**

**Can I exercise "too much"?**

### My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.