



Helping Patients Achieve an Active Lifestyle

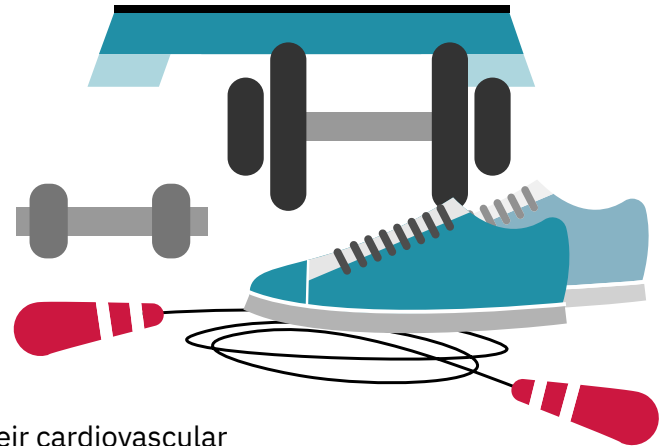
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Adopting regular physical activity and an active lifestyle is essential for patients to achieve the most improvement in their cardiovascular and overall health.^{1,2} However, helping patients maintain a physical activity regimen they feel fits their lifestyle, limitations, and preferences is much harder. This resource provides clinicians with useful tools to:



1 Assess the current physical activity levels of your patients.



2 Emphasize with patients the value of long-term exercise and activity for improved health.



3 Help patients find activity options that are safe, sustainable, and as enjoyable as possible.



4 Summarize exercise recommendations for heart health and maintaining weight loss.

1 Assess Patient Physical Activity Levels

Determine patients' baseline physical activity levels

Ask patients about their current level of physical activity to help personalize your approach to talking about exercise and sedentary behavior. For example, some occupations are active. Asking a restaurant server who gets 10,000 steps during a shift to “exercise” is not affirming this person’s aerobic activity level nor prioritizing the need to include activities that strengthen muscles and promote flexibility like lifting weights or doing yoga. Once you have an understanding of the type and level of activities in which patients are participating, you can take a patient-centered approach to helping them make physical activity a consistent part of life.

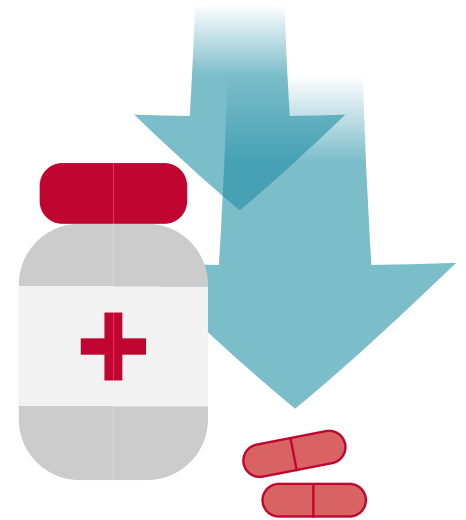
Encourage consistency over motivation

As a clinician, you know patients are not always motivated to exercise. Reassure patients that feeling unmotivated to exercise is normal and common. However, committing to activity is important. All people regularly do things that are important to them whether or not they feel motivated. We work, care for family, and fulfill commitments every day whether or not we feel motivated. Consistency – not motivation - is the key. Motivation may come later, but it is not needed.

2 Emphasize the Value of Long-Term Exercise and Activity for Improved Health

Promote exercise and activity as a tool to reduce medications. Patients often know they should engage in physical activity, but may not think of it as a tool to help them minimize medication need and use. Most physical activity has the added benefit of having little or no cost and no side effects, in addition to enhancing benefits for almost all aspects of their health. Share with patients that **physical activity positively impacts all of the following:**

- **Heart Health:** lowers blood pressure and the risk for heart attack and stroke
- **Cancer:** lowers the risk for breast, colon, prostate, and other cancers
- **Diabetes:** helps prevent diabetes and lowers blood sugar in people with diabetes
- **Muscle and Joint Health:** maintains and increases muscle strength and flexibility; reduces pain and improves function in many people with arthritis
- **Bone Health:** prevents bone loss and increases bone strength
- **Sexual/Reproductive Health:** improves erectile function in men and sexual interest and enjoyment in men and women; can increase fertility and may make pregnancy safer
- **Mind and Mood:** improves mood and energy level; improves thinking and may prevent dementia
- **Weight:** helps reduce obesity and increase resting energy (metabolism)
- **Chronic Disease:** helps manage and prevent diabetes; helps manage heart disease
- **Overall, Physical Activity Improves:**
 - Balance
 - Bladder control
 - Energy
 - Lifespan
 - Sleep quality



3 Help Patients Find Safe and Enjoyable Activities

Use **motivational interviewing** to ask about barriers to physical activity and encourage patients to determine what kind of physical activity would work best. Encourage them to try a variety of physical activities, as this may help them identify a new way to stay active. They may need to try an activity more than once in order to get comfortable and enjoy it. Help patients look for opportunities to be more active with these suggestions:

- Incorporate short bouts of exercise (e.g., 10 minutes during a lunch break)
- Use the stairs instead of the elevator
- Park the car at the opposite end of the parking lot to get more steps
- Avoid long periods of sitting
- Have standing meetings
- Walk to the mailbox
- Dance to music
- Use canned foods as weights and exercise in the living room
- Exercise during TV commercials
- Encourage patients to find a fitness buddy. Having another person to exercise with can help a patient sustain a long-term regimen.
- Give patients an exercise prescription to encourage more physical activity (see the **Additional Resources** section on page 5 for free exercise prescriptions).
- Encourage patients to track their progress and celebrate successes.



4 Provide Exercise Recommendations for Heart Health and Weight Loss

Evidence clearly demonstrates cardiovascular benefits from exercise. Expert panels, convened by organizations such as the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force,³ American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association,² the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,¹ and the American College of Sport and Medicine⁵ have made evidence-based recommendations for physical activity for adults. Some physical activity is better than none, and any amount has health benefits. Even if patients cannot achieve the full recommended activity level right now, any physical activity will improve heart health. Adults, including those with disabilities, should routinely be counseled during health care visits to achieve a physically active lifestyle.

Exercise Recommendations for Adults:

1. Achieve at least 150 minutes per week of accumulated moderate intensity or 75 minutes per week of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity (or an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous activity to reduce atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease).^{1,3}
2. Engage in muscle-strengthening activity (such as resistance exercise or weightlifting) at least two days per week.^{1,3}
3. Incorporate flexibility training, such as yoga, at least 2 to 3 times per week, with daily being most effective.^{1,3}



Moderate Physical Activity

(Heart beating fast; breathing harder, but can still talk)

- Walking briskly (about 3.5 miles per hour)
- Bicycling (less than 10 miles per hour)
- General gardening (raking, trimming shrubs)
- Dancing
- Golf (walking and carrying clubs)
- Tennis (doubles)
- Water aerobics
- Sports where you catch and throw (baseball, softball)



Vigorous Physical Activity

(Heart beating fast and hard; difficult to talk during activity)

- Running/jogging (5 miles per hour)
- Walking very fast (4.5 miles per hour)
- Bicycling (more than 10 miles per hour)
- Heavy yard work, such as chopping wood
- Swimming (freestyle laps)
- Aerobics
- Basketball (competitive)
- Tennis (singles)

Additional Resources:

1. **American College of Sports Medicine: Exercise is Medicine® Exercise Prescriptions** - includes common chronic conditions and corresponding exercise prescriptions with handouts.
https://www.exerciseismedicine.org/support_page.php/rx-for-health-series/
2. **American Heart Association Infographic: How Much Physical Activity do You Need?** - recommendations for adult physical activity.
<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/aha-recs-for-physical-activity-infographic>
3. **American Heart Association Walking 101 handout and tools** - includes practical tips on how to start a walking program.
https://www.heart.org/-/media/data-import/downloadables/6/1/6/walking-clubs-101-ucm_463348.pdf
4. **Move Your Way tools** - includes fact sheets, videos, and tips to make it easier to be more active.
<https://health.gov/moveyourway>
5. **Home Exercise for Patients with Disabilities** - physical activity resources for patients with disabilities.
<https://www.cardi-oh.org/best-practices/increasing-physical-activity-and-exercise-in-adults-with-disabilities>
6. **Taking Steps: Exercising to Promote Heart Health** - simple recommendations for improving cardiovascular health through physical activity.
<https://www.cardi-oh.org/assets/Cardi-OH-Taking-Steps-Exercising-to-Promote-Heart-Health.pdf>

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