

Fact Sheet

THE PROBLEM

Physical inactivity contributes to a variety of chronic diseases and health complications, including obesity, diabetes and cancer. In addition to improving a patient's overall health, increasing physical activity has proven effective in the treatment and prevention of chronic diseases. Even with all the benefits of physical activity, in the United States and many other countries, levels of inactivity are alarming. We are facing what is now referred to as an "inactivity epidemic," with tremendous costs.

- According to the World Health Organization's Global Health Risks data (2004), physical inactivity constitutes the fourth leading cause of death globally with about 3.3 million attributable deaths per year. Evidence (2009) using direct measure rather than survey data, shows physical inactivity as the leading cause of death in the U.S.
- More than half of adults (56%) do not meet the recommendations for sufficient physical activity according to the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines.
- In a study of older adolescents and adults in the U.S., participants spent almost eight hours a day in sedentary behaviors, while as much as 36% of adults engaged in no leisure-time physical activity at all.
- A study in 2008 showed that physical inactivity costs the U.S. Health Care System \$330 per person each year, which equals more than \$102 billion annually.
- 40% of U.S. primary care doctors and 36% of U.S. medical students do not meet the guidelines. Physically inactive doctors are less likely to provide exercise counseling to patients and provide less credible role models for the adoption of healthy behaviors. Not surprisingly, only 34% of U.S. adults report having received exercise counseling at their last medical visit.

THE BENEFITS

Many research studies have shown the benefits of regular physical activities. According to the U.S. Federal Physical Activity Guidelines and other studies, 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity physical activity are required to achieve these health benefits.

- Low levels of physical activity expose a patient to a greater risk of dying than does smoking, obesity, high cholesterol or hypertension. Regular physical activity can decrease the risk of death by 40 percent for older men.
- Active individuals in their 80's have a lower risk of death than inactive individuals in their 60's.
- Regular physical activity can:
 - Reduce mortality and the risk of recurrent breast cancer
 - Lower the risk of colon cancer by more than 60 percent
 - Reduce the risk of developing of Alzheimer's disease by approximately 40 percent
 - Reduce the incidence of heart disease and high blood pressure by approximately 40 percent
 - Lower the risk of stroke by 27 percent
 - Lower the risk of developing type II diabetes by 58 percent
 - Be twice as effective in treating type II diabetes than the standard insulin prescription and save \$2,250 per person per year compared to the cost of standard drug treatment
 - Decrease depression as effectively as Prozac or behavioral therapy.
- Adults with better muscle strength have a 20 percent lower mortality risk than adults with low muscle strength
- A low level of fitness is a bigger risk factor for mortality than mild-moderate obesity. It is better to be fit and overweight than unfit with a lower percentage of body fat.
- Regular physical activity has been shown to lead to higher SAT scores for adolescents.
- In an elementary school setting, regular physical activity can decrease discipline incidents involving violence by 59 percent and decrease out of school suspensions by 67 percent.

A SOLUTION TO THIS PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

Exercise is Medicine® encourages primary care physicians and other health care providers to include exercise when designing treatment plans for patients. Exercise is Medicine is committed to the belief that exercise and physical activity are integral to the prevention and treatment of chronic disease and should be regularly assessed as part of medical care. Along with the National Physical Activity Plan, Exercise is Medicine strives to make physical activity a “vital sign” that is routinely assessed at every patient interaction with a health care provider.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF EXERCISE IS MEDICINE

The guiding principles of Exercise is Medicine, a multi-organizational initiative coordinated by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), are designed to improve the health and well-being of our nation through a regular physical activity prescription from doctors and other health care providers, or from a health and fitness professional working with the health care provider. The guiding principles include:

- Physical activity is important to health and the prevention and treatment of many chronic diseases.
- More should be done to address physical activity and exercise in health care settings.
- Multi-organizational efforts to bring a greater focus on physical activity and exercise in health care settings are to be encouraged.

A CRITICAL CALL TO ACTION

Physical inactivity is a fast-growing public health problem and contributes to a variety of chronic diseases and health complications like obesity, heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, cancer, depression and anxiety, arthritis and osteoporosis. In addition to improving a patient’s overall health, increasing physical activity has proven effective in the treatment and prevention of chronic diseases. Therefore, Exercise is Medicine® calls on each person and all partners dedicated to the idea that exercise truly is medicine to continue to build, support and advocate for physical activity as essential for global health and well-being by committing to action. Policy makers are called to change policy to support physical activity as a vital sign for health. Health care providers and fitness professionals are called to integrate exercise into every patient and client interaction. Communities, work places and schools are called to promote physical activity as an essential part of health and wellbeing.

GET INVOLVED

Visit Exercise is Medicine online at www.exerciseismedicine.org to support the initiative, receive program updates and download resources.