

EXERCISE FOR OLDER ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

AHA Scientific Position

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for developing coronary artery disease. It also contributes to other risk factors, including obesity, high blood pressure, stroke, a low level of HDL ("good") cholesterol and diabetes. Even modest levels of physical activity are beneficial.

AHA Recommendation

Older adults and people with disabilities can gain significant health benefits with a moderate amount of physical activity, preferably daily. Physical activity doesn't need to be strenuous to bring health benefits. What's important is to include activity as part of a regular routine.

For older adults, this moderate amount of activity can come from

- Longer sessions of moderately intense activities such as walking or swimming.
- Shorter sessions of more vigorous activities such as fast walking or stair-climbing.
- Greater amounts of physical activity can bring more benefits. But it shouldn't be done excessively, or your risk of injury will increase.
- People with disabilities are less likely than people without them to engage in regular moderate physical activity. Still, they can benefit from exercise such as these:
 - Moderately intense activities (such as 30-40 minutes of using a wheelchair)
 - Shorter sessions of more intense activity (such as 20 minutes of wheelchair basketball)

Those who are physically active longer or more intensely will derive greater benefits.

What about moderate-intensity activities?

Scientific evidence also supports the notion that even moderate-intensity activities, when performed daily, can have some long-term health benefits. They help lower the risk of cardiovascular diseases. Here are examples of such activities:

- Walking for pleasure, gardening and yard work
- House work, dancing and prescribed home exercise
- For the elderly, walking, gardening and yard work are the most popular moderate-intensity leisure activities. Golf, badminton, croquet, shuffleboard, lawn bowling and table tennis are also recommended for older people.

Muscle-strengthening activities are also important for older people to reduce the risk of falling and improve the ability to perform daily tasks. The loss of strength and stamina attributed to aging is due, in part, to reduced physical activity.

Both older adults and people with disabilities should consult their physicians before starting a new physical activity.