

Editor's note

The year's end comes with the recent release of the second edition of the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans which reaffirms that physical activity is one of the most important, and necessary, practices people of all ages should adopt for a healthy life. Of the essence, physical activity promotes growth and development, makes people sleep better and feel better, as well as reducing the risk of chronic diseases. Of equal essence is that the beneficial health effects are immediate following exercise, with short duration exercise sessions also being beneficial.¹

The revised guidelines complement the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, acknowledging that accruing such health benefits is dependent upon personal efforts to increase physical activity daily, be it with family, friends, patients, colleagues, at school, or in the workplace or community environment. The guidelines also summarise the available evidence on the beneficial effects of physical activity, define the amounts and types of physical activity recommended for different ages (older than three years) and populations. Some new aspects of the guidelines include:

- Additional health benefits related to brain health, additional cancer sites, and fall-related injuries;
- Immediate and longer-term benefits for how people feel, function, and sleep;

- Further benefits among older adults and people with additional chronic conditions;
- Risks of sedentary behaviour and their relationship with physical activity;
- Guidance for preschool children (ages three through five years);
- Elimination of the requirement for physical activity of adults to occur in bouts of at least ten minutes; and
- Tested strategies that can be used to get the population more active.

The guidelines can be seen as an important milestone in our on-going efforts to achieve better health based on prevention. Ultimately, however, their impact on health is dependent on the required behavioural changes at the level of the individual.

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Reference

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018. https://health.gov/paguidelines/second-edition/pdf/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf