Many people feel they don’t have time for regular physical activity, or they’re too tired. But being physically active every day is one important aspect of a healthy lifestyle. Increasing your heartbeat, strengthening your muscles, and increasing your flexibility contribute to physical fitness. Being physically fit has a number of health benefits in both the short-term and the long-term.

Research shows that regular physical activity can promote psychological well-being and aid in reducing feelings of mild to moderate depression and anxiety. On a day that you’re feeling a bit tired, down, or stressed, consider taking a brisk walk—it can help you.

Leading a physically active lifestyle can also help maintain a healthy weight and prevent weight gain. Expending calories through physical activity can help balance the calories you take in as food. Just remember, don’t counteract all the physical activity you do by eating a lot of unhealthy foods.

People with higher levels of physical activity are at lower risk for developing chronic disease. Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, stroke, coronary artery disease, type 2 diabetes, colon cancer, and osteoporosis.

Different intensities and types of activity provide different benefits. Generally, if you are able to talk while performing the physical activity, it’s moderately intense. But if you’re breathing hard and it’s hard to hold a conversation, the activity is vigorously intense. Vigorously intense activity burns more calories per unit of time.

For most people, moderately intense physical activities include:
- Walking briskly
- Doing yard work
- Scrubbing the floor
- Actively playing with children
- Biking at a casual pace

### Estimated Calories Needed by Gender, Age, and Activity Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age (Years)</th>
<th>Sedentary</th>
<th>Moderately Active</th>
<th>Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>2 - 3</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000 - 1,400*</td>
<td>1,000 - 1,400*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4 - 8</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,400 - 1,600</td>
<td>1,400 - 1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 - 13</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>1,600 - 2,000</td>
<td>1,800 - 2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 - 18</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19 - 30</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000 - 2,200</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31 - 50</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51+</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>2,000 - 2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4 - 8</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>1,400 - 1,600</td>
<td>1,600 - 2,000</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These levels are based on Estimated Energy Requirements (EER) from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) Dietary Reference Intakes Micronutrients Report, 2002, calculated by gender, age, and activity level for reference-sized individuals. "Reference size," as determined by IOM, is based on median height and weight for ages up to 18 years and median height and weight for that height to give a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 21.5 for adult females and 22.5 for adult males.

* Sedentary means a lifestyle that includes only the light physical activity associated with typical day-to-day life.

* Moderately active means a lifestyle that includes physical activity equivalent to walking about 1.5 to 3 miles per day at 3 to 4 miles per hour, in addition to the light physical activity associated with typical day-to-day life.

* Active means a lifestyle that includes physical activity equivalent to walking more than 3 miles per day at 3 to 4 miles per hour, in addition to the light physical activity associated with typical day-to-day life.

* The calorie ranges shown are to accommodate needs of different ages within the group. For children and adolescents, more calories are needed at older ages. For adults, fewer calories are needed at older ages.
Strength training exercises are resistance exercises that can increase endurance, increase the strength of your muscles, and maintain the integrity of your bones. They’re an important part of getting physically fit and strong, and it’s beneficial to include them 2 or more days a week.

Specifically, strength training makes your body strong and more toned, and has the potential to reduce the risk of osteoporosis. Examples include using free weights, weight machines, or resistance bands.

FITTING IN FITNESS
Finding time to exercise can be a challenge. It is important to schedule it in and make it part of your routine. One way to fit it in is to exercise during your breaks throughout the day. Studies show you get the same health benefits from breaking up physical activity into three to six 10-minute or two to four 15-minute intervals throughout the day. As long as you get your heart rate up and keep it up for the whole 10 or 15 minutes, it’s your daily total that’s important.

HYDRATION
Proper hydration is important when participating in physical activity. To avoid dehydration, be sure to drink plenty of water or other fluid (non-alcoholic) both during and after the activity.

MOTIVATION
There may be times when you need extra motivation. Leveling-off periods are normal and may signal that it’s time to get help from others. You can plan activities with a group, find a buddy to exercise with, record your progress, and feel good about small, consistent changes.

For more information on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, please visit www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.