



Fact Sheet

CONTACT

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THE PROBLEM

Physical inactivity is a fast-growing public health problem and 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 most recent Global Health Risks data (2004) after high blood pressure, tobacco use and high blood glucose, physical inactivity constitutes the 4th leading cause of death globally, with about 3.3 million attributable deaths per year. More recent evidence (2009) using direct measure, rather than survey data shows physical inactivity to be the leading cause of death in the US.
- More than half of adults (56%) do not meet the recommendations for sufficient physical activity in the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines.
- In a study of older adolescents and adults in the US, 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 shows that physical inactivity costs the US Health Care System \$330 per person each year, which equals more than \$102 billion dollars annually.
- 40% of US primary care doctors and 36% of US medical students do not meet 2008 federal physical activity 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 US adults report having received exercise counseling at their last medical visit.

THE BENEFITS:

Many research studies have shown the benefits of regular physical activities. The US Federal Physical Guidelines and many studies show that 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity physical activity is required to achieve these health benefits.

- Research shows that a low level of physical activity exposes a patient to a greater risk of dying than does smoking, obesity, hypertension, or high cholesterol, and for older men, regular physical activity can decrease the risk of death by 40%.
- Active individuals in their 80s have a lower risk of death than inactive individuals in their 60s.
- Regular physical activity can:
 - Reduce mortality and the risk of recurrent breast cancer by approximately 50%.
 - Lower the risk of colon cancer by over 60%.
 - Reduce the risk of developing of Alzheimer's disease by approximately 40%.
 - Reduce the incidence of heart disease and high blood pressure by approximately 40%.
 - Lower the risk of stroke by 27%.
 - Lower the risk of developing type II diabetes by 58%
 - Be twice as effective in treating type II diabetes than the standard insulin prescription and can save \$2250 per person per year when compared to the cost of standard drug treatment.
 - Can decrease depression as effectively as Prozac or behavioral therapy.
- Adults with better muscle strength have a 20% lower risk of mortality (33% lower risk of cancer specific mortality) 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% and decrease out of school suspensions by 67%.



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A SOLUTION TO THE GREATEST PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Exercise is Medicine[®] is an initiative focused on encouraging 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 are as follows:

- Exercise and physical activity are 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, including 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 wellbeing 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, workplaces 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 an [Action and Promotion Guide](#). Visit www.exerciseismedicinemonth.org for tips, tools and ideas to plan your own local event or activity during Exercise is Medicine Month in May or throughout the year, including a PowerPoint slide deck and media advocacy tools.

Support for the Exercise is Medicine[®] Global Initiative is Provided By:

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INACTIVITY EPIDEMIC REFERENCES

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Physical inactivity: the biggest public health problem of the 21st century
Blair SN. Physical inactivity: the biggest public health problem of the 21st century. *Br J Sports Med* 2009; 43:1-2.
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Physical activity habits of doctors and medical students influence their counseling practices.
Lobelo F, Duperly J, Frank E. *Br J Sports Med*. 2009 Feb;43(2):89-92.
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Physical activity and colon cancer: confounding or interaction?
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Larsen EB et al. *Annals of Internal Medicine* 2006; 144:73-81



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INACTIVITY EPIDEMIC REFERENCES (Continued)

- Reduces the incidence of high blood pressure and heart disease by approximately 40%.
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16293717>
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Association between muscular strength and mortality in men.
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- Fewer disciplinary incidents and fewer out of school suspensions.
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