

Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults

This is the TD Fitness Podcast with Coach T, episode number 81.

Welcome to the TD Fitness Podcast, giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. And now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey, hey, hey. What's up, guys? This is Coach T from TD Fitness here. This is episode number 81 of the TD Fitness Podcast. And in this episode, we are talking about some physical activity guidelines, specifically the physical activity guidelines that were recently published. The idea here is really to give you a better sense for what the experts are saying when it comes to how much and what type of physical activity you should be participating in on a regular basis.

There's a lot of information out there that tells us that we should exercise, and a lot that tells us the types of exercise that we should do, and how often, and who should exercise, and when to exercise, and how to do it, and why. I mean, the five Ws, who, what, where, when, how, and why, as they say. There's a lot of information out there on the internet, or maybe people you know, or various, various different sources depending on where you determine you should look. But, what do I base my advice on, and what guidance do I follow? It's not some random exercise plan or blog off the internet. I guess the irony here is that some would consider this a random blog on the internet, but that's neither here nor there. But, I adhere to the recommendations set forth in the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans because that outlines the amounts and types of physical activity that's recommended for different ages and different populations in America.

Much of what I present here in this episode will actually be taken directly from the physical activity guidelines because the information is presented rather well there. Now, the document is really meant ... It was really created for fitness and health professionals so that we can provide accurate and research-based advice to those we seek to serve, so that's my intent here today.

Just a real quick background, though, the last ... No, actually, the first and the previous physical activity guidelines were published back in 2008. Those guidelines really laid out the way to perform safe physical activity, things that were considered safe, things that the researchers, doctors, and so forth, all the experts said this is what you should do in order to remain healthy just strictly from a physical fitness standpoint. Those 2008 guidelines focused primarily, though, on that the benefits of disease prevention when it comes to physical activity. But the 2018 report, which is the most recent, really expands what they're ... the information that they're trying to present here. It shows that there is more to exercise than disease prevention. I know we all know that. We talk about it here on the podcast, but sometimes it's good to get a reminder. In fact, though, there are a variety of other benefits, including better sleep habits, just feeling better, and being able to perform daily tasks more easily.

The 2018 scientific report also notes some immediate benefits of physical activity in addition to those related to the regular physical activity over months or years. Now, you may remember me referencing the Dietary Guidelines for Americans in previous episodes of the podcast. So if you think about it this way, the dietary guidelines are really the guidelines from a nutrition standpoint, and the physical activity guidelines are meant to complement those dietary guidelines, but only on the physical side, because obviously there's two parts to

healthy living, the two major parts. We understand that healthy living consists of both a healthy diet and physical activity. Those two documents provide guidance for the public on the importance of being physically active and the importance of eating a healthy diet to promote good health and reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

The physical activity guidelines, who is it for? Well, it actually covers a number of different populations, if you will, all the way from pre-age school children, preschool-age children I should say, to children and adolescents, adults, and older adults. Then, it includes some very specific populations in the sense that it addresses pregnant and postpartum women and adults with chronic health conditions and diseases.

We're going to actually break this podcast or this topic up into a two-week stint. This week, I'm presenting information on what the physical activity guidelines say for adults, because that's the large majority of the individuals listening to this podcast. Now, I understand, though, and I'm one of them, some of us have children. We're parents, right? So we're interested in understanding what the physical activity guidelines say for our kids as they grow from very young ages into the adolescent years. I also want to address next week some of the older population considerations, and I'm going to touch on some of the pregnant and postpartum topics as well. This week is all about what the guidelines say about adults and what they prescribe for adults, and next week we're going to talk about children, adolescents, older adults, and the pregnant and postpartum women next week.

I'll stay that I strive for better, not perfect. You guys have heard me say that before, and I continue ... My advice to you is to continue to do that. Better, not perfect. That's that's the mindset you should have when it comes to living a healthier life. Because as I've said before, there's so many things that tell us, "Oh, this is what you're supposed to do. No, you have to exercise this many times a week. You have to get this much activity in." Well, the truth is that not all of us are there. Not all of us are ready for that. Not all of us, frankly, can fit those types of things in when it comes to other obligations and other necessities of life.

My point with these guidelines is to tell you what's stated, but these are provided as a reference based on the research. The guidelines are meant to let you know what's best for your health, but your goal should be to make improvements in your current activity level if you find that you're well below what these guidelines recommend. Because although these are saying what's best for your health, only you know what's best for you from day to day from a scheduling standpoint and from a motivation standpoint from what you can actually fit in day in and day out given all of the other challenges and all of the other things that you have to consider. That's kind of one of the things that I wanted to be sure to relay with this topic.

Now, some key changes with this report. I mentioned that it's a little bit different than the 2018 ... or 2008 guidelines. The first is that it points out that there are some immediate as well as long-term benefits for how people feel, how they function, and how they sleep based on the physical activity you do, and I'll touch on that a little bit later here. Also, it highlights the risks of sedentary behavior and the relationship of those risks with physical activity. It eliminates the requirement for physical activity for adults that your activity has to last at least 10 minutes to be effective. That's not true. The science shows that, literally, every little bit helps. It's okay. You get up from your desk during the day, you get up and take a 5- or 10-minute walk, guess what? There's some immediate benefits from that, and that contributes to health from a physical fitness standpoint. Also, there are some tested strategies that can be used to get the population, to get folks around the country more active. Those are some of the highlights from the 2018 report, this most recent report.

Now, I know we've talked about the benefits of physical activity before, but I think it's important just to highlight some of those here, some specifically that are pointed out in the

Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. Broadly speaking, physical activity is going to foster normal growth and development, can make you feel better, function better. As I mentioned, your sleep habits are benefited from physical activity, and it does reduce the risk of a large number of chronic diseases. We saw that in the first publishing of the physical activity guidelines back in 2008. And as I said, those health benefits start immediately after exercising. Even those short episodes of physical activity are beneficial, and there are a number of other additional benefits to the older population, such as older adults.

But as we dive deeper into these benefits, there's strong evidence that demonstrates that moderate to vigorous physical activity not only improves the quality of sleep you get, but it reduces the length of time that it takes you to go to sleep, and it reduces the time that you're awake after going to sleep and before getting up in the morning. You actually get better sleep throughout the night if you have good physical fitness and physical activity actions going on in your life. And it can increase the time that you're in the deep sleep and reduce daytime sleepiness. I know that's kind of counterintuitive. I'm exercising more. I'm doing more throughout the day. Isn't that going to make me more tired? No, because you're going to sleep better at night because of that. Your body, our bodies were meant to move. The counter to that is our bodies were meant to rest on a normal sleep cycle. So when you can improve both of those aspects of your life, you're going to feel better throughout the day when you actually need to function.

Now, there's also some strong evidence from adults that demonstrates that the perceived quality of life is improved by regular physical activity, and your physical, your mental, and your emotional health are all benefited from physical activity. It improves physical function among individuals of all ages because that enables us all to conduct our daily lives with the amount of energy that we need and without getting tired, without undue fatigue.

There are a number of adverse health outcomes that are negated by physical activity, and we know that some activity is better than none. For most health outcomes, additional benefits occur as the amount of physical activity increases right through the higher intensity, or a greater frequency, or a longer duration. But, again, you don't have to exercise for a long time. I do recommend staying consistent with it. That doesn't necessarily mean every day. That means making it a normal part of your life on a regular or routine basis. We've seen that some substantial health benefits for adults, though, occur between somewhere between 150. I'm sorry, 150 and 300 minutes a week of moderate physical activity. That could include things like brisk walking. But as you do more and more physical activity, you will see more and more benefits. But again, you don't have to start there. I'll talk a little bit about where we each are in our journey for physical fitness, if you will.

The physical activity guidelines point out that not only is aerobic exercise or cardiovascular exercise important, but muscle strengthening exercises are also beneficial. Then, as I said, we'll get into it next week, but there's some health benefits that occur for children, adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, and even older adults in those special populations that I mentioned, too.

The benefits of physical activity, though, generally outweigh the risk of any adverse outcomes or inner injury. Sorry. But, a lot of times, we'll use the excuse, "I would do more, but my knee is bothering me," or "My back hurts." Well, a lot of times if we move more, then those things won't be as much of an issue.

I have definitely seen that in my own personal life. For the longest time, I had a hard and fast rule that I would never do more than 9.9 miles on my feet. I would never walk more than 9.9 miles, never run more than 9.9 miles. I had a hard and fast double digit. Double digits on my feet was not going to happen because I thought that my knee couldn't handle it. But as it

turns out, as I started getting into the longer races and so forth and focusing on my flexibility, I found that my knee pain essentially went away. I found that my back pain was no longer an issue once I incorporated some regular core exercises into my routine. That's exactly what this is saying here. The benefits of physical activity outweigh the risk of injury. Don't let the fact that a nagging injury, don't think that that should prevent you from exercising. Move more, and you will probably feel better. Obviously, clear that with your doctor, but you should definitely look to move more.

Now, if all of those benefits, all those things that I mentioned, if that's not reason enough to add more physical activity to your life, then I have something else for you here, this concept of all-cause mortality. You may have heard about this, but basically, it's the things that cause us to die. There's strong evidence that shows that physical activity delays death from all causes. This includes the leading causes of death, like heart disease, some forms of cancer, and other causes of death as well.

This is really remarkable in a couple of ways because the first part is that only a few lifestyle choices have such a large impact on mortality as physical activity. It's been estimated that people who were physically active for approximately 150 minutes a week have a 33% lower risk of all-cause mortality than those who are not physically active. And the second part of this, I've mentioned it already here, but it doesn't take much. You don't have to do 150 minutes a week. It's not necessary to do large amounts of activity or highly intense activity to reduce that risk of all-cause mortality. The benefits start to accumulate with any amount of moderate or vigorous intensity physical activity. That's important. I mean, basically, you exercise this ... The research shows that you have a higher percentage of living longer. That is the reason why I exercise because I want to be here for as long as I can for my family and loved ones. So, that's huge. That is a huge benefit.

Now, one of the main ideas behind the guidelines is that regular physical activity over months and years can produce some long-term health benefits. This speaks to the consistency piece that I so often talk about here on the TD Fitness Podcast. So again, consistency doesn't mean that I have to do something every day. That would be great if you can, but I'll be honest, I don't have time to do something every day. But, I do set goals for each week. For me, I set a goal of five exercise sessions each week, so five of seven days I want to do something in the realm of physical activity because, again, that produces long-term health benefits if you can stay with it over time. It's not perfection all the time that we're looking for, it's consistency over time. So when you look back on your past days, weeks, months, and years, did you exercise more than not? That's really the question that it boils down to.

We talked a little bit about the timing of benefits. A single session of moderate to more intense physical activity has some very significant impacts, can reduce your blood pressure, improves insulin, or I'm ... improve insulin sensitivity. For some reason I can't talk in this episode. It improves your sleep, reduces anxiety symptoms, and improves some aspects of cognition on the day that it is performed. That's one of the reasons, actually, I like to exercise in the morning because I just feel more alert. I feel like I'm sharper throughout the day.

Now, most of these improvements become even larger with ... They're enhanced the more you incorporate, the more physical activity you incorporate into your life. Then, those other benefits, like disease risk reduction, improved physical function, all of that starts to come about within days to weeks after consistently, again, consistently, being more physically active.

Now, I want you to note here that I haven't said anything about performance. I haven't said anything about running fast. I haven't said anything about how much weight you lift because we're talking about a healthy lifestyle, and we're talking about quality of life, and we're

talking about long-term health. So often we get wrapped up in, "Well, I'm just not a fast runner," or, "I just don't feel comfortable going to the gym because I don't think that I can do with the other people are doing there." That doesn't matter. You have to do you. You have to do what is right for you, and what's right for you is just being a little bit better than you were yesterday or than you were last week or last month. Now, I mentioned that the guidelines are meant to let you know what's best for your health, but, again, your goal should be to make improvements in your current activity level if you find that you're well below the recommended guidelines.

Now, I know there are different levels of current physical activity. Different groups of us are currently performing different amounts of physical activity. So if you are completely inactive right now and if you're not doing any exercise beyond just the basic movement that's required for your daily life activities, then your goal should be to reduce sedentary behavior because there are some significant health benefits there. And when I say reduce sedentary behavior, I mean think about the amount of time that you're sitting during the day and really not doing anything from a movement standpoint and you want to incorporate some type of movement because that will reduce the risk of all-cause mortality, like we said. It also reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, and the incidence of type 2 diabetes, and, again, some cancers.

So that's a good first step, is just to replace some of that sitting down time, some of that sedentary behavior with light intensity, very light intensity, physical activity. That could be walking. It could be standing up and stretching. Previously evidenced that light intensity physical activity shows it could provide health benefits just from that little amount that you do. That's important to know. No matter how much time you spend in sedentary behavior, light intensity exercise, or light intensity movement I should say, is going to work in your favor.

Now, if you're already pretty ... If you're somewhat active but you're not doing a whole lot, maybe once or twice a week you get out and go for a walk or do something with the kids, but you're not quite meeting the key guidelines, that target range of 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity exercise, then, again, your goal should just be to improve a little bit because even ... I'll say it again. Even small increases in that activity that you're doing can provide health benefits.

There's not a threshold. The guidelines have to put out some a range that says, "Okay, this is where we start to see the most benefits." but I'm here to tell you that it's not a threshold that you have to exceed before you see any benefit. Greater benefits can be achieved just by reducing the sedentary behavior and by increasing the moderate intensity of physical activity or a combination of both. Because for any given increase in physical activity, the relative gain and benefits is greater for those of us who may not be exercising much at all than it is for those who are already meeting the guidelines. Said another way, you're going to make more gains if you go from 0 to 60 then you will if you go from 60 to 65, for example, because the benefits of exercising compared to those not exercising are much greater than me adding one additional workout a week if I'm already exercising five times a week, if that makes sense.

Now, for people who are active, that's people who are already meeting what the guidelines recommend, that 150 minutes a week of moderate activity, even though you're within the target range already, you can see some benefits if you add a little bit more. Good on you if you're already pretty active, but adding a little bit more can't hurt. More, though, doesn't necessarily mean more time. It doesn't mean more weight. What I like to point out is that once you're meeting the time requirement or the time recommendation, then we can start to get a little bit smarter about what we're doing. I like to incorporate some flexibility, some core work, and things like that to make sure your exercise plan is more well-rounded.

And then if you're pretty highly active, again, good on you. But again, you need to focus on making sure that you're providing all that your body needs from a physical activity standpoint. Because if you're able to exercise a lot, I mean, upwards of 300 minutes a week, that's like five hours a week. For those of us with busy lifestyles, that is very tough to do. But there are some hardcore, dedicated ... Just love to run, for example, running miles and miles each day. I'll tell you that that's good for your heart, but, again, there are some other things that you can and should add to your exercise routine to make sure you're more well-rounded.

What I recommend for those who are active or highly active is the more well-rounded approach. What I recommend for those who are not quite sufficiently active is just adding more to your routine. And what I recommend for those who are inactive is to not be as sedentary and to get up and move more. And that's not just what I recommend, but that's what the physical activity guidelines recommends.

So put plainly, the key guidelines for adults, adults should move more and sit less throughout the day, because some activity is better than none, and adults who sit less and do any amount of activity gain some health benefits. Then, for substantial benefits, for substantial health benefits, you should shoot for 150 minutes, that's two and a half hours, to 300 minutes, or five hours, a week of moderate intensity exercise. Or if you're going to do high intensity exercise or vigorous exercise, you basically get double credit, if you will, because then your goal should only be about 75 minutes, which is an hour and 15 minutes to 150 minutes a week of that vigorous or high intensity aerobic physical activity. Or you can combine both.

So what does this actually look like? Yesterday, I went for a three-mile run. That is actually vigorous activity when you look at the types of things and the way it's defined. If you have a hard time carrying on a conversation when you're doing whatever kind of exercise it is, then the physical activity guidelines essentially define that as vigorous activity. I ran 30 minutes yesterday. I get 60 minutes of credit, if you will, towards my 150 minutes. That's kind of how that plays out. And I actually track that. I've been tracking it manually for the longest time. My wife just recently got me this awesome GPS watch that does it for me. So you can either track it manually or you can use some of the technology things, gadgets that are out there to do that for you.

Again, there are additional benefits gained if you exercise more than that, but that's what the guidelines say. It's 150 minutes of moderate activity. That could be walking, light exercises, or 75 minutes of high intensity exercise, which is where it's hard for you to talk or carry on a conversation. The physical activity guidelines also state that we should add muscle strengthening activities to our routines as well. That should occur two or more days per week, and then I always add that core stretching or core exercise and stretching are important as well.

Now, this is getting pretty long, so I'm going to wrap it up here. The takeaways for this episode, move more and sit less. Remember that some exercise, some movement is better than none, and more is better than some. And although the benefits aren't necessarily visible right away, the results are nearly immediate. What I mean by that is that physical activity can reduce anxiety, and blood pressure, and improve the quality of sleep and your insulin sensitivity. Those aren't things that you're going to see with your eyes or notice right away, but trust and realize that the added physical activity is having a positive effect on you.

That's what I wanted to relay. Hopefully that provides some insight into what the physical activity guidelines are all about, what they are there for, what they are meant to do. These tips, and strategies, and so forth, this data that I provide from week to week, I don't just make it up. It's actually grounded in science and research. That's why I wanted just to point out that the importance of the physical activity guidelines.

Join me next week when we will continue our discussion on the physical activity guidelines, and we're going to talk about kids. We're going to talk about adolescents, older adults, and pregnant and postpartum women next week. There's stuff in the guidelines there for everyone. The show notes for this episode can be found at tdfitness.net/081. I have a couple of resources there for you, a link to the physical activity guidelines themselves, and also a handout for adults that's published by health.gov that is really information about why regular activity is important, and what kind of activity we need as adults, and how we can get it. Thanks so much for tuning in, for hanging with me. I want you all to have a blessed week. This is Coach T signing out.