

## **Dear Diary: How Active Am I?**

by the American Institute for Cancer Research

You may have heard of food diaries, in which you record everything you eat – including what, how much and when. An exercise diary is similar. By recording your activity, you can take a detailed look at where you are and chart your progress. You may be surprised how much your endurance, strength, balance and flexibility improve over time.

Staying active is one of the most important things you can do to improve your quality of life and life expectancy. Scientists recently determined that the second largest underlying cause of death for all deaths reported is lack of exercise combined with poor diet.

Smoking is the largest.

Research also suggests that exercise decreases cancer risk by regulating hormones and growth factors associated with cancer. The evidence is strongest for colon, breast and prostate cancers. Consequently, the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) recommends that individuals aim for 60 minutes of moderate activity each day as well as a total of 60 minutes of vigorous activity during the week. But remember that some exercise is better than none. Consult your doctor about your fitness plan and increase your activity gradually.

### **Start Simple**

Your exercise diary can be a small notebook. If you are just beginning to be active, it's a good idea to test yourself to see how fit you are. Then, every month, test yourself again to compare your state of health. Like most people, you should see a rapid change soon after your start. This progress may be the encouragement you need to continue for the long term.

Here are four tests you can use to measure endurance, lower-body power, strength and balance.

### **Endurance**

Go to a location that is convenient for you – even a hallway will do – and see how far you can walk in exactly six minutes. Next month, see how much further you can go in the same six minutes.

### **Lower-Body Power**

As fast as you safely can, walk up a flight of stairs (at least 10 steps) and time yourself. How much less time will it take you next month?

### **Strength**

Choose an object like hand weights, bricks or even cans of soup. Record their weight and how many times you can lift them before tiring. A month later, do you need heavier weights?

### **Balance**

As you stand near something (such as the back of a sturdy chair) to grab onto in case you start to fall, time yourself as you stand on one foot, without support, for as long as

possible. Repeat standing on the other foot. A month later, you should be able to stand on one foot for a longer period.

When recording your activities, make sure that you are honest, accurate and realistic. After recording one week of activity, decide what to aim for the following week. By starting simply, you might become devoted to your exercise diary – and your good health. For a free wallet-sized exercise journal to start off with, call AICR at 1-800-843-8114, ext. 10 and request Making Strides.

Reprinted *with permission of The American Institute for Cancer Research.*