

Small Doses of Exercise Add Up **by the American Institute for Cancer Research**

If you don't want to join a gym or wear special clothes, you can still be more physically active for good health and to lower cancer risk. Here are some ways to work more exercise into your everyday schedule. Be sure to check with your doctor first before adding more exercise to your routine.

Going to a gym for exercise isn't the only way to stay fit. There are alternatives to that intensive style of workout – and some might actually work better for you than going to a gym.

Several research studies have confirmed that exercising in 10 or 15 minute intervals throughout the day is at least as effective as exercising all in one hour each day. In fact, getting more movement throughout the day might even be better for your body than being very active for only one hour and inactive for the other 23.

“Fitness equals longevity,” says Mirabai Holland, Director of Fitness and Wellness Programs at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. “If you do three 10-minute bouts of exercise totaling just 30 minutes a day, one study found you could reduce your risk of heart disease and cancer by 50 percent.

“You have to think of being active as something important. And if you can think of it as putting years on your life, it might help you start,” Mirabai says.

“One reason people make exercise a regular habit is that it makes them feel good,” she notes. “It adds to your quality of life. People say, “Boy, I feel so much better, I think I'll actually do this again tomorrow.” That's when you get to the next level, where it is a part of your life every day.

Walking Whenever Possible

Roseanne Lander, a student in Mirabai's class, says she has always been a walker. “I walk my husband to work every day, which is about 1 ½ miles each way, and I walk whenever I can. I go to Mirabai's class twice a week for low-impact exercise and weight-lifting. I also carry lots of grocery bags.”

A couple of years ago, Roseanne was diagnosed with cancer and began treatment. She says it made her feel weak, but her doctor told her to do some walking each day. “Even if I was feeling really bad, it always made me feel better when I walked. Now, the more I walk, the better I feel.”

She used to wear any shoes for walking, but after her treatments started, her feet hurt. So she got some rubber-soled walking shoes, which solved the problem.

Moves to Live By

Mornings. A great way to get started each morning is by getting under a warm shower, says Mirabai. The water warms up your muscles and you can start with a few simple stretches for your shoulders and neck.

- In the shower, first shrug your shoulders and hold the position for three seconds, then slowly release; repeat two more times. Second, slowly circle your shoulders forward three times, then circle them backward three times. Third, put your right hand lightly on

top of your head and tilt it to the right side ways to gently stretch your neck, holding three seconds. Repeat using the left hand and tilting your head to the left.

When you get out of the shower, Mirabai suggests a few more moves to limber up.

- Standing with your feet slightly apart, make two fists and hold them against your lower back. Look upward slightly and gently arch your back – not too far – with your abdominal muscles pulled in and your knees slightly bent. Keep your weight even on both feet. Hold this stretch for 10 seconds and release.

Midday. Later in the day, you can exercise your abdominal muscles while you are sitting.

- Sit on the edge of the chair so your back is straight and both feet are flat on the floor. As you exhale, pull your ab muscles in to your spine and hold for 10 seconds, then release your muscles. Repeat 8-10 times in a row.
- During the day, take the stairs instead of the elevator, park farther away from the store, library or office and walk 15 minutes the rest of the way, or walk the whole way if you can. Play your favorite lively music and garden or clean house to the beat.
- You also can use cans of soup or bean as weights to lift while you're watching TV to strengthen the muscles in your upper arms. Starting with your arms straight, slowly bend your elbow to lift and lower the can. Repeat 8 times for each arm.
- Standing push-ups are good for your upper body. Face the wall, standing a few inches away from it and with your feet a little wider than hip width. Put your hands on the wall, in front of – and no higher than – your shoulders. Remember to keep breathing while you lean forward (1) and then, with your hands still on the wall, push back. Repeat 8 times.

Evenings. If your muscles aren't used to this much activity during the day, do them a favor by stretching out at night.

- For a good calf stretch, stand a foot away from a doorframe or wall and lean against it with both hands. Bend your right knee and extend your left leg behind you straight, keeping your left foot flat on the floor, until you feel a stretch in your left calf. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds, then switch legs to stretch the right calf.

A Little Effort Means a Lot

“If you haven't been active much, just adding five minutes a day of activity can get you started,” Mirabai says. “Many people think they have to do a lot, and so they don't bother at all. The opposite is true – it really doesn't take that much.

“Even taking a slow, deep breath every so often can relieve stress, helping your heart and your overall health.”

For more exercise ideas, visit Mirabai's web site at www.movingfree.com, or call 1-800-999-6427.

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