

### Lifestyle Activity

**Lifestyle activity** refers to any physical activity you do as part of your normal daily routine. For example, walking up stairs at home or at work is a regular part of your day, but still can help you to burn extra calories.

During the next month, in addition to your regular physical activity routine, try to take advantage of natural cues around you to add a little more lifestyle activity to your day. **Continue adding new lifestyle activities all month.**

**What types of lifestyle activities do you plan to add to your routine?**

- Take the stairs instead of elevators and escalators (or at least walk up the escalator).
- Use bike paths (walk or bicycle) instead of driving to work or errands.
- When you must drive, park a little further from your destination and walk the rest of the way.
- Take physical activity breaks during the day. Get up, walk around, and enjoy the activity!
- Reduce use of energy-saving machines. For example, wash your car by hand.
- When you ride a bus, walk to the next stop before boarding (or get off a stop early).
- Try new activities, such as dancing, gardening, or bowling.
- Others:

### Step Up Your Walking

Walking is one of the safest and simplest forms of physical activity. Now that you have been physically active for some time, you may be at a point where you want to increase how fast or how long you are walking.

To ensure success, follow these six steps:

- 1. Warm up:** Begin walking slowly. Increase your speed after two to four minutes, once you feel that your muscles have begun to warm up and loosen. Continue at this pace until you are ready to go full speed.
- 2. Include light stretching:**Some studies show that light stretching of leg muscles used in walking may improve performance and reduce the risk of injury. Try some light stretches after your warm-up.
- 3. Step it up gradually:** Increase your distance and pace over time. Aim for longer walks after you get comfortable with the routine. Set a new time or distance goal at the beginning of each week to keep it challenging.
- 4. Mix it up:** Changing pace, direction, scenery, and distance a couple of days each week keeps your walking routine fresh and interesting. Don't feel that you're locked into a specific time or distance. Allow yourself "easy" days when you feel like backing off a little, but try to walk on most days.
- 5. Use a relaxed walking technique:** The less you think about your style, the better. Just focus on staying comfortable and in control. If your shoulders are tight, arms are flailing, or back tires quickly, you're probably walking too fast.
- 6. Work in extra steps throughout the day:** Every little bit counts, so look for different times during the day where you can take a walk instead of sending an email, take a walk instead of waiting in the car for an appointment or while the kids are playing sports, or take the long way to the water cooler.

## Using a Pedometer

Consider using a **pedometer** to measure how active you are throughout the day. Using a pedometer can add fun and a new challenge to your activity plans.

### Using a pedometer is easy:

2,000 steps = 1 mile

- ✓ Put the pedometer on first thing in the morning; remember to reset it every day.
- ✓ Clip the pedometer to your clothes at your waist.
- ✓ Make sure the pedometer is on tight, straight, and does not move around a lot.
- ✓ Write down in your “Food and Activity Tracker” the number of steps you take each day.

### Other helpful hints:

- ✓ Do not get the pedometer wet. Keep it under your coat if you are walking in wet weather.
- ✓ If you are having trouble keeping the pedometer clipped to your waist, consider clipping it to your hip, back, or the top of your sock. Keep in mind that these readings may not be as accurate, but at least you will have an idea of how many steps you are taking.

# Foster Flexibility

Another important part of regular physical activity is **flexibility**.

### What is flexibility?

- Flexibility refers to a joint's ability to move through its full range of motion.
- We use flexibility in everyday activities, such as bending to tie our shoes, reaching in the pantry for an ingredient, or twisting around to see who is calling our name.

### Why is flexibility important?

- Flexibility is an important part of fitness that is often ignored. Flexibility is not just for people practicing ballet, gymnastics, or martial arts; rather, it is an important part of fitness for everyone regardless of age, gender, goals, or experience.
- Poor flexibility of the lower back and hamstrings (back of the upper leg) has been shown to contribute to low back pain.
- Having good flexibility may help to reduce stiffness, prevent injuries, and maintain good range of motion in the joints.

### How can I improve (or maintain) my flexibility?

- The best way to maintain flexibility is to stretch regularly, at least once a day.
- Perform basic stretches using the upper and lower body.

## Safety Guidelines for Stretching

Remember these guidelines while performing stretching exercises:

- ✓ Do a short warm-up *before* stretching. A warm-up loosens the muscles to prevent injuries.
- ✓ Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
- ✓ Move slowly until you feel the muscle stretch. A safe stretch is gentle and relaxing.
- ✓ Hold the stretch steady for 10 to 30 seconds. **Do NOT bounce.** Bouncing can lead to torn muscles.
- ✓ Relax. Then repeat the stretch two to three times.
- ✓ Be careful to stretch both sides of your body – **stay in balance.**
- ✓ Stretch within your own limits. Don't push yourself.
- ✓ Never stretch if you have pain before you begin.
- ✓ If a particular stretch causes pain, stop doing it.
- ✓ Breathe slowly and naturally. **Do NOT hold your breath.**
- ✓ **Always stay in control.** Jerky, unsteady movements can lead to injury.

**Listen to your Body!**



### Simple Stretching Exercises

Here are some basic stretching exercises most people can do. Use a chair to sit on or to assist you during each stretch.

- **Overhead stretch (shoulders):** Extend your arms overhead with elbows straight; interlock your fingers if possible. Keep your back and neck straight.
- **Mid-back stretch:** Extend your arms in front of you with elbows straight; interlock your fingers if possible. Gently pull forward, separating your shoulder blades.
- **Chest stretch:** Extend your arms behind you with elbows straight; interlock your fingers if possible. Gently lift your elbows upward.
- **Side bends:** Extend one arm up overhead and gently lean to the opposite side. Repeat with the other arm.
- **Trunk (middle) rotation:** Sit in a chair and gently rotate your middle and shoulders to one side, using your arms to help you rotate. Repeat in opposite direction. You should feel a stretch in your **middle**.
- **Hamstrings:** Sit in a chair and extend one leg forward, with the back of your heel resting on the ground. Keep your knee straight and gently lean forward to your toes. Repeat on other leg.
- **Calf stretch (ankle and calf):** Hold onto a chair or countertop. Place one ankle behind the body with knee straight and the foot flat on the floor. Put the other leg slightly forward and bent. Lean forward to feel the stretch. Repeat on the other side.

*Source: National Center on Physical Activity and Disability*



## Better Balance

### What is balance?

- Balance is the ability to control and maintain your body's position as it moves. Your brain, muscles, and bones work together to keep you steady and to keep you from falling.
- You use balance in everyday activities, such as rising from a chair, going up or down stairs, getting out of a car, or walking.

### Why is balance important?

- Balance training helps the muscles work together and it strengthens the body's ability to correct itself when balance is lost. This is helpful when you are doing activities, like walking or bike riding, as well as in all your daily activities (getting in and out of cars, carrying groceries, playing with children).
- Having good balance is also one of the best ways to **prevent yourself from falling**.

### Can I improve (or maintain) my balance?

- Balance is a skill that almost everyone can preserve throughout life. If you have become a little "unbalanced," it is possible to improve your balance. In addition to normal aging, balance can be affected by injury, illness, nervous system disease, and medications.
- If you have concerns about your balance, **please consult your health care provider before trying any exercises**.

### Simple Balance Exercises

When preparing for balance exercises, wear loose, comfortable clothing and shoes with good support. Make sure you perform balance exercises on firm, hard surfaces (such as a wood floor).

Here are some basic balance exercises most people can do:

- ✓ Start with good posture, which you can practice anywhere, anytime.
- ✓ Walk. It is a good form of physical activity and it helps you maintain your balance.
- ✓ Stand in a doorway or near a table or chair (so you can steady yourself at any time). Try **standing on one leg** for 30 seconds. You can modify this exercise by:
  - **Standing hip raise:** Lift one knee forward so that it is parallel to the hip and bent at a ninety degree angle
  - **Standing knee bend:** Bend the knee backwards, so that the shin is in line with the floor
  - **Standing kick:** Keeping the leg straight, lift one leg out in front of you, with the foot in a “kick” position
  - **Standing side kick:** Keeping the leg straight, lift the leg out to the side
  - **Tandem standing:** Place one foot directly in front of the other, touching heel to toe
- ✓ Practice **side-stepping or braiding** (walking sideways crossing one leg over the other) at the kitchen counter. Start by holding onto the counter and progress to letting go as your balance improves.