

Nutrition News

VOLUME 10, No. 5

A COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMS NEWSLETTER

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Spring into Fitness in May

Spring is in full swing, and May is National Physical Fitness and Sports Month.

What a great time to focus on fitness during this observation, which was officially started in 1983 by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

This month-long focus on fitness and sports can be traced back to the "President's Fitness Test" that schools have given to students for years. Each year individuals, schools and organizations join the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports to bring about awareness of the benefits of physical activity.

Since childhood obesity has become an epidemic in America, First Lady Michelle Obama has taken on the task to solve this epidemic within a generation. The Department of Health and Human Services, the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports and members of the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity are partnering with the First Lady's "Let's Move" initiative to inspire kids to be more physically active and to learn to appreciate nutritious foods.

So what exactly is physical activity? And what is the difference between physical activity and exercise? Physical activity simply means getting your body moving. Exercise is a form of physical activity that is planned, structured and repeats movements, such as in aerobics class or weight training.



Exercise and physical activity benefit every area of your life.

They can:

- Help manage and prevent diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis and breast and colon cancer.
- Strengthen your heart and bones.
- Raise your "good" cholesterol.
- Help control weight.
- Reduce stress and feelings of depression.
- Help improve your balance.

The American College of Sports Medicine says that adults should aim to be active at a moderate level of intensity for 30 minutes on most (if not all) days of the week. If 30 minutes every day seems like a lot, start with what you can do and work up. Thirty minutes can be broken up into shorter periods of 10 or 15 minutes of exercise throughout the day.

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Some examples of moderate physical activity include:

- Walking (about 3 ½ miles per hour) or bike riding instead of driving
- Walking up stairs instead of taking an elevator
- Mowing the lawn with a push mower instead of riding a lawnmower
- Raking leaves
- Gardening
- Cleaning the house
- Pushing a stroller
- Putting groceries away

Twenty minutes of vigorous physical activity three times a week has added health benefits.

Some examples of vigorous activity include:

- Walking very fast (4 ½ miles per hour)
- Jogging or running (5 miles per hour)
- Walking and climbing briskly up a hill
- Backpacking
- Race walking
- Step aerobics
- Bicycling (more than 10 miles per hour)
- Jumping rope
- Playing competitive sports, such as basketball, football, soccer, kickball
- Carrying several heavy bags of groceries

Other examples of moderate and vigorous intensity activities can be found at http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/physical_activity.html.

You should also do muscle-strengthening activities at least two days a week. Be sure to strengthen all the major muscle groups, which include the legs, hips, back, chest, stomach, shoulders and arms. Sit-ups, push-ups and using a resistance band work great. No gym membership is needed to get the benefits of exercise.



Children need at least 60 minutes of active play daily. They need to run, climb, jump and just get up and move around, away from their desks, the television and computer. Children involved in sports and recreational activities learn about teamwork, fair play, focus and dedication. Some become athletes and that teaches them goal-setting and leadership skills. It has been shown that children who are physically fit are better students.

Be sure to focus on improving your health rather than on weight. Make time to exercise together as a family. Walk the kids to the bus stop instead of driving them, play basketball or kickball with them, or just take a walk after dinner.

May is the perfect time to get active and healthy. As the weather gets warmer, regular exercise can be important and enjoyable.

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May 2011**

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This material was partially funded by USDA's Food Stamp program. The Food Stamp program provides nutrition assistance to people with low income.

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