

Walk NEBRASKA

Small Steps to Staying Fit and Healthy

Regular physical activity is important for your overall health and well-being. Every small step makes a difference. Each day include activities that you enjoy and can easily fit into your daily routine such as walking your dog, working in your garden, or riding your bike. Try to do something every day to stay fit and healthy.

Being active for 30-60 minutes on most days can help build a healthy body so you have the strength to perform everyday activities without feeling tired. Staying fit will also help you to relax and reduce your stress, gain more energy, and improve your sleep. These benefits all add up to decreasing your risk of heart disease and other medical conditions such as colon cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, and high blood pressure. Health-related physical fitness includes the following components:

Aerobic fitness – improves the ability of the heart and lungs to deliver oxygen to muscles (examples include walking, jogging, running, riding a bike, swimming, or playing sports).

Muscular strength and endurance – maintaining the amount of force and repetition necessary to do normal activities easily and protect the lower back (examples include lifting weights, using resistance bands, yoga, and gardening).

Flexibility - ability to move your muscles and joints through their proper range of motion (examples include gymnastics, yoga, tai chi, etc.).

Body composition - not too much body fat, especially around the waist. (See body composition test from the [American Heart Association](#)).

How do you rate on a self-assessment of your fitness level?

Use the Pre-participation Screening Questionnaire (self-assessment) provided by the American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine to figure out if you are high or low risk for medical problems like a heart attack when following vigorous daily exercises. This self assessment is for people aged 18 and older who are in good health. By completing this questionnaire, you can decide if it is safe to follow an aerobic fitness program that includes muscular strength, flexibility, and endurance exercises. To self-assess, go to the [President's Challenge Adult Fitness Test](#) and complete the online questions.

Remember the adage "use it or lose it" says it all. For example, by not using your muscles, you will lose strength in your arms and legs. You can improve your level of fitness by changing the amount, time, intensity and types of exercises you engage in daily.

Sources:

Small Steps to Health and Wealth™, *Monthly Health Message* October 2011. For more information on the program, check out: smallsteps.unl.edu.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Physical Activity for Everyone, 2011. For more information and helpful videos check out: <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/index.html>

President's Challenge – Adult Fitness Test. <http://www.adultfitnessstest.org/>

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