

Active at Any Size

Part 1—Getting Started

Do you feel that you can barely do any activity at all? That you cannot exercise, play sports, or become more fit? If you are a very large person, you can still be physically active.

Very large people face special challenges in trying to be active. You may not be able to bend or move in the same way that other people can. It may be hard to find clothes and equipment for exercising. You may feel self-conscious being physically active around other people. Facing these challenges is hard—but it can be done!

The information in this article may help you start being more active and healthier—no matter what your size!

Why should I be active?

Being physically active may help you live longer and protect you from:

- Diabetes.
- Heart disease and stroke.
- High blood pressure.
- Osteoporosis (a disease leading to weak bones that may break easily).
- If you have any of these health problems, being physically active may help control or improve your symptoms.

Regular physical activity helps you feel better because it:

- Lowers your stress and boosts your mood.
- Increases your strength.
- Helps control blood pressure and blood sugar.
- Helps build healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps your heart and lungs work better.
- Improves your self-esteem.
- Being physically active can be big fun!

How do I get started?

Appreciate yourself!

If you cannot do an activity, don't be hard on yourself. Feel good about what you can do. Be proud of pushing yourself up out of a chair or walking a short distance. Pat yourself on the back for trying even if you can't do it the first time. It may be easier the next time!

To start being more active and keep at it:

- Start slowly. Your body needs time to get used to your new activity.
- Warm up. Warm-ups get your body ready for action. Shrug your shoulders, tap your toes, swing your arms, or march in place. You should spend a few minutes warming up for any

physical activity—even walking. Walk more slowly for the first few minutes.

- Cool down. Slow down little by little. If you have been walking fast, walk slowly or stretch for a few minutes to cool down. Cooling down may protect your heart, relax your muscles, and keep you from getting hurt.
- Set goals. Set short-term and long-term goals. A short-term goal may be to walk 5 minutes on at least 3 days for 1 week. It may not seem like a lot, but any activity is better than none. A long-term goal may be to walk 30 minutes on most days of the week by the end of 6 months.
- Get support. Get a family member or friend to be physically active with you. It may be more fun, and your buddy can cheer you on.
- Track your progress. Keep a journal of your physical activity. You may not feel like you are making progress but when you look back at where you started, you may be pleasantly surprised!
- Have fun! Try different activities to find the ones you really enjoy.

What physical activities can a very large person do?

Do I need to see my healthcare provider before I start being physically active?

You should talk to your health care provider if you:

- Have a chronic health problem such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma or arthritis
- Have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or personal or family history of heart disease
- Are a woman over age 50 or a man over age 40

Most very large people can do some or all of the physical activities in this series of *Active at Any Size* articles. You do not need special skills or a lot of equipment. You can do:

- *Weight-bearing activities*, like walking and golfing, which involve lifting or pushing your own body weight.
- *Non-weight-bearing activities*, like swimming and water workouts, which put less stress on your joints because you do not have to lift or push your own weight. If your feet or joints hurt when you stand, non-weight-bearing activities may be best for you.
- *Lifestyle activities*, like gardening, which do not have to be planned.

Physical activity does not have to be hard or boring to be good for you. Anything that gets you moving around—even for only a few minutes a day—is a healthy start to getting more fit.

Chances are your health care provider will be pleased with your decision to start an activity program. It is unlikely that you will need a complete medical exam before you go out for a short walk!

Weight-Control Information Network (WIN). (Revised 2006, October). Active at Any Size. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIH Publication No. 04-4352. Retrieved June 29, 2009, at <http://win.niddk.nih.gov/>