

## 10.2 Activity and Exercise

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. List the physical and mental health benefits of regular exercise.
2. Plan a program of regular exercise that you enjoy and can maintain.

### Does Exercise Really Matter?

Exercise is good for both body and mind. Indeed, physical activity is almost essential for good health and student success. The physical benefits of regular exercise include the following:

- Improved fitness for the whole body, not just the muscles
- Greater **cardiovascular fitness** and reduced disease risk
- Increased physical endurance
- Stronger **immune system**, providing more resistance to disease
- Lower **cholesterol** levels, reducing the risks of cardiovascular disease
- Lowered risk of developing **diabetes**
- Weight maintenance or loss

Perhaps more important to students are the mental and psychological benefits:

- Stress reduction
- Improved mood, with less anxiety and depression
- Improved ability to focus mentally
- Better sleep
- Feeling better about oneself

For all of these reasons, it’s important for college students to regularly exercise or engage in physical activity. Like good nutrition and getting enough sleep, exercise is a key habit that contributes to overall **wellness** that promotes college success. First, use the Exercise and Activity Self-Assessment to consider your current habits and attitudes.

### EXERCISE AND ACTIVITY SELF-ASSESSMENT

Check the appropriate boxes.

	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom
1. I enjoy physical activity.			
2. Exercise is a regular part of my life.			
3. I get my heart rate up for twenty to thirty minutes several times a week.			
4. I enjoy exercising or engaging in physical activities or sports with others.			

Write your answers.

5. What physical activities do you enjoy?

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6. How often each week do you engage in a physical activity?

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7. If you feel you're not getting much exercise, what stands in your way?

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8. Overall, do you think you get enough exercise to be healthy?

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9. Do you feel a lot of stress in your life?

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10. Do you frequently have trouble getting to sleep?

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## How Much Exercise and What Kind?

With **aerobic exercise**, your heart and lungs are working hard enough to improve your cardiovascular fitness. This generally means moving fast enough to increase your heart rate and breathing. For health and stress-reducing benefits, try to exercise at least three days a week for at least twenty to thirty minutes at a time. If you really enjoy exercise and are motivated, you may exercise as often as six days a week, but take at least one day of rest. When you're first starting out, or if you've been inactive for a while, take it gradually, and let your body adjust between sessions. But the old expression "No pain, no gain" is not true, regardless of what some past gym teacher may have said! If you feel pain in any activity, stop or cut back. The way to build up strength and endurance is through a plan that is consistent and gradual.

For exercise to have aerobic benefits, try to keep your heart rate in the **target heart rate** zone for at least twenty to thirty minutes. The target heart rate is 60 percent to 85 percent of your maximum heart rate, which can be calculated as 220 minus your age. For example, if you are 24 years old, your maximum heart rate is calculated as 196, and your target heart rate is 118 to 166 beats per minute. If you are just starting an exercise program, stay at the lower end of this range and gradually work up over a few weeks.

“Additional Resources” below includes an online calculator that estimates your target heart rate depending on your present level of fitness.

## Enjoy It!

Most important, find a type of exercise or activity that you enjoy—or else you won’t stick with it. This can be as simple and easy as a brisk walk or slow jog through a park or across campus. Swimming is excellent exercise, but so is dancing. Think about what you like to do and explore activities that provide exercise while you’re having fun.

Do whatever you need to make your chosen activity enjoyable. Many people listen to music and some even read when using workout equipment. Try different activities to prevent boredom. You also gain by taking the stairs instead of elevators, walking farther across campus instead of parking as close to your destination as you can get, and so on.

Exercise with a friend is more enjoyable, including jogging or biking together. Some campuses have installed equipment for students to play Dance Dance Revolution. Many Nintendo Wii games can get your heart rate up.

You may stay more motivated using exercise equipment. An inexpensive pedometer can track your progress walking or jogging, or a bike computer can monitor your speed and time. A heart rate monitor makes it easy to stay in your target zone; many models also calculate calories burned. Some devices can input your exercise into your computer to track your progress and make a chart of your improvements.

The biggest obstacle to getting enough exercise, many students say, is a lack of time. Actually, we all have the time, if we manage it well. Build exercise into your weekly schedule on selected days. Eventually you’ll find that regular exercise actually saves you time because you’re sleeping better and concentrating better. Time you used to fritter away is now used for activity that provides many benefits.

## Campus Activities Can Help

Most campuses have resources to make exercise easier and more enjoyable for their students. Take a look around and think about what you might enjoy. A fitness center may offer exercise equipment. There may be regularly scheduled aerobic or spin classes. You don’t have to be an athlete to enjoy casual sports such as playing tennis or shooting hoops with a friend. If you like more organized team sports, try intramural sports.

### Additional Resources

**Exercise guidelines and more information.** See <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/index.html>.

**Target heart rate calculator.** Find your target heart rate to experience the benefits of aerobic exercise (based on age only) at <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/target-heart-rate/SM00083>.

**Target heart rate calculator based on age and current fitness level.** See [http://exercise.about.com/cs/fitnesstools/l/bl\\_THR.htm](http://exercise.about.com/cs/fitnesstools/l/bl_THR.htm).

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Regular exercise has many benefits for your body and mind. You'll also be a better student.
- It is easier to make exercise a regular part of your life if you explore your interests and join activities with others. The time you spend exercising will be made up for with increased ability to concentrate when it's time to study.

## CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. It is recommended that college students get \_\_\_\_\_ minutes of aerobic exercise at least \_\_\_\_\_ times a week.
2. List at least two ways to make exercise more fun.

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