

Healthy Steps to Exercise

From your friends at Blue Care Network

Use it or lose it

If you're not aware that regular exercise can help you live longer and reduce your risks for a host of diseases, then chances are you've been living under a rock. Come out from under!

Exercise is important because your body was designed to be used. Like any fine tool or instrument, it can get rusty if it just sits around. When it's regularly tuned up, it gives optimal performance. Fitness helps you to look and feel good.

Recent studies show:

- Leisure-time physical activity is associated with a reduced risk of premature death, even after genetic disorders are taken into account (*Journal of the American Medical Association*).
- Improving fitness appears to help men live longer following a heart attack (*The National Exercise and Heart Disease Project*).
- Lifestyle physical activity, such as taking the stairs, gardening and walking instead of driving, is as effective as structured gym workouts in improving fitness (*Journal of the American Medical Association*).
- Even occasional exercise helps postmenopausal women live longer (*Journal of the American Medical Association*).

Walking works

The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports reports that walking one mile burns about 100 calories, depending on the level of the walker's intensity and speed.

According to the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, brisk walking, on a regular basis, can:

- Decrease your risk of a heart attack
- Decrease your chances of developing diabetes
- Help control your weight
- Improve your muscle tone
- Promote your overall sense of wellness

Talk to your doctor

Talk to your primary care physician first before beginning any intensive exercise program. If you ever experience severe pain, call your physician immediately.

Oh, my aching back!

Most adults — up to 80 percent — will have back pain sometime. For most, the pain will go away after treatment at home or by a physician. For some, the pain becomes chronic and can seriously limit their activities.

Here are three things you can do to reduce back pain:

- Make lifestyle changes such as increasing your activity level, improving your posture, losing weight and stopping smoking.
- Learn what you can do at home when you first feel a strain on your back, such as applying ice, relaxing and performing gentle exercises. Once the pain is reduced, apply a heating pad for about 20 minutes at a time for several times a day.
- Understand the importance of good body mechanics. Rest is important when you first injure your back. But too much rest isn't good. Inactivity could lead to stiffness, weakness and a slower recovery. Get up and walk around every few minutes. This will help you maintain strength and muscle tone. It may also help reduce pain.

Resources

If you suffer from low back pain

BCN's Low Back Pain Management Program is available to members 18 years and older who have been diagnosed with lower back pain. You'll receive valuable information on how to better manage low back pain.

For more information or to see if you're eligible, call the Disease Management department at 800-392-4247 or 800-257-9980 for TTY users. Also, check out our Web site at MiBCN.com/lowback.

BCN can help keep you safe during your workouts.

Show your BCN identification card to save 20 percent at Michigan Dunham's Sports for safety items such as helmets and padding for bicycles, in-line skates and scooters; athletic braces and supports; and life jackets.

Members also get a 10 percent discount at Michigan Dunham's Sports on all golf balls, tennis balls, Pro Line golf sets and drivers and select Nike products.

It's a fact . . .

You don't have to enroll at a gym to work out. You can build exercise into your daily routine and improve the quality of your life. Here's how to make the most of your time and resources:

- Take a walk at lunchtime or after dinner.
- Get off the bus one or two stops early and walk the rest of the way.
- Wash and wax your car by hand instead of driving through the car wash.
- Take a brisk walk around the mall before you start shopping.
- Lift light arm weights while talking on the phone. Don't have weights? Use cans of food or telephone books.
- Ride a bike.
- Work in your garden or yard. Use a push mower instead of a riding mower.
- Walk the dog. Start with easy walks of five to 10 minutes a day and gradually increase your time.

Tips to live by...

Exercise at work

Raise your activity level and productivity with neck rolls or arm raises (push hands out to the side and then up toward the ceiling). Or do a few modified push-ups on the edge of your desk.

Here are two exercises to do at your desk:

Seated leg extension

- Sit in a sturdy, firm chair.
- Slowly extend one leg straight out in front of you, keeping your thigh on the chair.
- Hold for a few seconds, and then slowly lower to the starting position.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Seated hamstring stretch

- Sit in a chair with one leg extended in front of you, slightly to the side.
- Slowly lean forward and reach toward the extended foot with both hands.
- Hold the stretch for a few seconds.
- Repeat on the other side.

Seated twist

- Place your feet on the ground about hip width apart.
- Bring your right hand to the outer edge of your left thigh and, breathing in, twist until your left arm is resting on the back of the chair.
- While breathing out, gently turn your head, neck and upper body in the same direction.
- Take a deep breath in this position, trying to increase the stretch.
- Repeat to the opposite side.