A person and person walking a dog

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**Physical Activity Can Limit Your Need for Medications**

[Betty Chaffee](https://bettermymeds.com/author/bjc2018/)/  August 18, 2022/  [Exercise](https://bettermymeds.com/category/exercise/), [Self management](https://bettermymeds.com/category/self-management/)/  [0 comments](https://bettermymeds.com/?p=4239#respond)

Many patients come to Better My Meds for help because they don't want to take so many medications. It's true that many common health problems like osteoporosis, diabetes, heart disease, mood disorders, and others are usually treated with medications. And medications can pile up as we get older. But there's another effective treatment for all these health problems and more -- regular physical activity! It may be hard to believe, but in fact physical activity can prevent or treat many common health disorders.

[Research shows](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/data/inactivity-prevalence-maps/index.html#overall) that many of us don't get enough exercise, and a good number of us don't get any at all. Across the United States, the numbers of people who get no activity outside of work hours tops 30% in many areas. There are lots of reasons for that. Many of us aren't big fans of physical activity. It takes effort, it may make us sweat or cause temporary discomfort. It can be so much easier to just sit down. Anyway, we're busy. We may feel like we have too much to do to take time out for activity. Gym memberships and sports equipment cost money. And exercising alone can seem boring.

But research shows that we do ourselves a favor when we get up out of that chair and exert ourselves. A [short walk](https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-a-2-minute-walk-after-meals-can-help-lower-type-2-diabetes-risk) after a meal can lower blood sugar more quickly than sitting down, possibly preventing the onset of diabetes. Weight-bearing exercise strengthens bones to help prevent [osteoporosis](https://www.bones.nih.gov/health-info/bone/bone-health/exercise/exercise-your-bone-health). Aerobic activity (getting that heart rate up) strengthens the heart muscle to [prevent heart disease, high blood pressure](https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/prevention.htm), and [atrial fibrillation](https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/moderate-to-vigorous-exercise-may-help-prevent-atrial-fibrillation#:~:text=Regular%2C%20moderate%2Dto%2Dvigorous,The%20American%20Journal%20of%20Cardiology.). Activity that gets joints moving can relieve stiffness that comes with [osteoarthritis](https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/physical-activity/getting-started/benefits-of-exercise-for-osteoarthritis#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20exercise%20is%20considered,movement%20in%20patients%20with%20osteoarthritis.). Isometric exercise, including simple at-home routines as well as yoga and Pilates, strengthens muscles to improve balance and[prevent falls](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000493.htm) (and fractures). And there's a lot of research to show that physical activity can [improve mood](https://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/12/exercise), prevent depression and relieve stress. It helps us sleep better, keep our weight stable, and can even [prevent some types of cancer](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/pa-health/index.htm).

It's obvious that regular exercise is an effective way to maintain health and even avoid medications. So why is it so hard for many of us to develop a regular exercise routine?

A person sitting at a desk with a computer and a pen

Description automatically generated with low confidence***Too much to do***

Yep, we're all busy. Our to-do lists are long, and exercise often doesn't even make the cut. But given how well it works to prevent and treat common health problems, maybe we need to make it a priority. How about putting "activity" on the to-do list each day? Sure, something else may not get done. Thinking about it another way, lots of things won't get done if your health declines. Make it a priority to stay healthy! It doesn't have to take a lot of time. And of course, some days it won't get done, just like everything else on the to-do list. But writing it down makes it more intentional.

***Exercise is tiring***

A picture containing laying

Description automatically generatedYou won’t find me arguing with this one. Physical activity uses up energy, for sure. But if fatigue is keeping you from your routine, consider backing off a little. Many of us tend to go “all in” when we get serious about a lifestyle change. But there’s no need to do that with exercise. Try something a little less strenuous until your body gets accustomed to it. Go slow and work your way up gradually.

***Exercise isn't fun***

It's true, lots of people don't exercise because they just don't enjoy it for one reason or another. It's also true that lots of people don't like to cook, but they still have to eat, so they figure out a tolerable compromise. It can be the same way with physical activity. Don't like to exercise? Maybe finding a podcast, an audio book, or going to a nature preserve to watch birds would make walking more tolerable. Or turn itA couple of people playing tennis

Description automatically generated with medium confidence into a social event - consider taking up pickleball with some friends, or joining a dance class with a friend or partner. Don't want others to see you sweat? Try some yoga or other workout videos from YouTube and do it by yourself when no one's watching! There are lots of ways to get activity in, and if you try you're liable to find at least one that you can tolerate (or even enjoy!).

Background pattern

Description automatically generated***Joint pain makes it too hard to exercise***

There's no doubt that joint pain can make it difficult to be physically active. But that doesn't mean it's impossible. The [arthritis foundation](https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/physical-activity/getting-started/benefits-of-exercise-for-osteoarthritis) recommends regular exercise for tthose with osteoarthritis. Eventually it helps relieve stiffness and pain, and will make daily activities easier. To get over that initial hump, the arthritis foundation suggests starting slow, and doing a variety of activities at a pace that suits you. You can even ask for help from a physical therapist to find the mix of activities that's right for you.

***But here's the good news --***

The [current recommendation](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/older_adults/index.htm) for physical activity is for adults to get about 150 minutes every week. That's just 1/2 hour five times weekly, and it doesn't have to be 30 minutes all at one time, either. The activity should be at least moderately strenuous, and you can go for a mix of aerobic, weight-bearing, and strengthening exercises. No need to do the same thing every day. Here are some [suggestions](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/adding-pa/index.htm) for getting started.

But the best news is this -- ***any amount of physical activity is better than none.*** Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Park further away from the entrance of a building. Consider using a desk that allows you to stand while working. And housework and yardwork count, too!

If you're not already getting the recommended amount of exercise, consider making physical activity a priority in your life. It's okay to start slow, but get started on something. As hard as it may be, your health and sense of well-being will be big winners. You may even come to enjoy it!

Are you having trouble making the commitment to get regular activity? Or do you have suggestions for those who are? Please comment in the space below, or [contact us](https://www.bettermymeds.com/contact-us-2) directly at ***BetterMyMeds***. We love hearing from you!

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Betty Chaffee, PharmD, is owner and sole proprietor of BetterMyMeds, a Medication Management service devoted to helping people get the maximum benefit from their medications.