

**Q: How much exercise should a person get each week?**

**A:** It depends on what kind of exercise you do. According to the Centers for Disease Control, adults should try to get at least half an hour of "moderate" physical activity most days of the week. In addition to exercise and sports, the CDC includes "active hobbies that cause light sweating or a slight to moderate increase in breathing or heart rate occurring five or more time per week for at least 30 minutes each time." However, if you engage in "vigorous activity"-which causes heavy sweating and large increases in breathing or heart rate-you can get away with exercise three times a week for at least 20 minutes each time.

Despite the fact that exercise has been linked to a lower risk for heart disease, obesity, diabetes, osteoporosis, plus longer life and lower rate of disability, we are very much a nation of couch-potatoes. A new federal survey suggests that about 80% of us do not engage in a high level of overall physical activity, and about 1 in 4 of us do little or no exercising at all. This has led government officials to put out warnings about "reversing the alarming rise in obesity". The new report, which interviewed 32,000 people, showed that only one person in five were "very active during usual daily activities and engaged in regular leisure time physical activity." Men tended to be more physically active than women, and activity rates dropped as people got older. About half of the people interviewed said they walk during their normal daily activities, but 37% said they just sit. More than two-thirds do not engage in regular physical activity in leisure time.

The study also said that people whose daily activities are more active-involving walking, or lifting or carrying loads-were more likely to be physically active in their leisure time, than those who mostly sit or stand during their normal day. People with less than a high school degree tend to exercise less than those with a college degree. Low-income people are three times less likely to be active than adults in higher income groups.

The number of adults who sit during their daily activities increased with age: 31% of people 18-24 versus 46% of people age 65 or over. Seniors were five time more likely to be inactive than the youngest adult grouping: about 22% of those 65 and older said they were "never active," compared to 4% in the 18-24 age group. Nearly half of the seniors (44%) said their physical activity was "low or medium," but a third (34%) said they had medium high or high physical activity. Nearly 4 out of 10 seniors get no or low activity, compared to less than one in five (19%) of the youngest adults.

"Physical activity-whether it's walking the dog or simply taking the stairs at work-is essential to good health," the report concluded. The good news is that 3 out of 4 Americans has got the message. The bad news is that 25% of us have not.