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CHAPTER 1

Physical Fitness



Think about the challenges your body faced today. Did you run to the bus stop? Did you carry a heavy backpack? Did you play a sport?

Your body's ability to meet these daily demands is called *physical fitness*. Regular exercise is one of the keys to physical fitness. It helps you stay healthy and look and feel your best.

Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise strengthens your heart. During aerobic exercise, you breathe in more oxygen (air), and your body uses it in an effective way. Aerobic exercise makes your heart beat faster. It pumps more blood



to your muscles and provides them with more oxygen. Aerobic power helps you do hard, physical work.

Swimming, biking, walking, and running are examples of aerobic exercise. Lifting weights is an example of muscle-building or strength-training exercise. It is not an aerobic activity.

How much aerobic exercise is enough? The Mayo Clinic says to do at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity a day. Getting regular exercise can help you live a longer and healthier life.

Aerobic

Using or related to the body's use of oxygen.

Walking as Aerobic Exercise

- **Leisure walking:** Stroll at a light to moderate pace.
- **Race walking or power walking:** This form of walking comes close to running. To do it, pick up your pace and pump your arms.
- **Hill walking:** After walking on flat ground at a moderate pace for 5 to 10 minutes, walk up a hill at a steady pace. Then walk down the hill and back up again.
- **Interval training:** Start with a warm-up by walking at a light pace for 5 to 10 minutes. Next, walk as quickly as you can for 20 seconds. Then walk at a normal pace for 40 to 60 seconds. Continue to switch back and forth between a fast and a normal speed.





No More Excuses!

Many people make excuses for not exercising. But there's a way to argue against every common excuse:

- **“I don't have enough time to exercise.”** Fit exercise into your regular activities:
 - Walk 5 to 10 minutes throughout the entire day, not all at once.
 - Drive less and walk more. Park your car at the far edge of the parking lot.
 - Replace some kind of weekly entertainment with a physical activity. For instance, instead of going to a movie with friends, go bike riding.
- **“Exercise is boring.”** Find something you enjoy doing—anything that gets you moving.
- **“I'm worried how I'll look at the gym.”** Exercise alone at home with a DVD or game system video. Think about how you'll improve and look better over time.
- **“I'm too tired when I get home from work.”** Bring your workout gear with you so you don't go home after work, or have your gear ready to go when you walk in the door. Also try exercising earlier in the day.
- **“I'm too lazy!”** Exercise at the time of day you feel most energetic. Plan a schedule and stick to it. Start with a short walk. Ask others to support you.





Guidelines for Stretching

- Don't stretch your muscles when they're cold. Walk at a light pace for 5 or 10 minutes before doing your warm-up stretch. Then stretch again after you exercise.
- Stretch all of your major muscle groups, not just your legs. Also, be sure to stretch both sides of your body.
- Don't bounce when you stretch. Instead, hold the stretch for approximately 30 seconds. Repeat each stretch three or four times.
- Don't stretch to the point that you hurt. You should feel tension, not pain.
- Add movement to your stretching. For instance, reach up or out with your arms while stretching your legs. Think of the movements used in yoga and the martial arts.

Play It Safe!

Exercise is a *must* for good health, but be sure to exercise safely. Warm up first to loosen your muscles before you put them to work. And stretch before exercising to reduce the chance of injury.

After your activity, make sure to give your muscles time to cool down and relax.

Benefits of Exercise

Most people who exercise regularly say they couldn't get along without it! Scientists have found that the body releases special chemicals during exercise. Those chemicals, called *endorphins*, create a sense of