

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDE

MODULE 2 • BALANCED LIFE • WHOLE-PERSON PROGRAM



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INTRODUCTION

Physical activity is an integral part of health and wellness and is defined as anything that gets your body moving. Prioritizing movement is an act of self-love and self-care. By carving out time to move your body, you're giving yourself the gift of energy, focus, and strength.

Physical activity is bio-individual. You can create more space for movement in a way that feels natural, authentic, and enjoyable and adds to your overall quality of life. Your approach can be whatever works for you, and it will change and evolve over time.

TYPES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The World Health Organization defines physical activity as “any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure.” In other words, any type of movement counts!

Types of physical activity can be broken down into four categories: balance, cardiovascular, mobility, and strength.

[Read on to learn more about their benefits and some examples.](#)

Balance

Description: movement that improves the body's stability, coordination, and ability to maintain equilibrium during daily activities

Benefits: prevents falls and injuries

Examples:

- Standing on one leg
- Using a BOSU or stability ball
- Holding a yoga pose

Cardiovascular

Description: movement that gets the blood, heart, and lungs pumping

- Aerobic ("requires oxygen"): cardiovascular activity that can be sustained for extended periods of time
 - Anaerobic ("without oxygen"): cardiovascular activity that cannot be sustained for long periods of time and is shorter and more intense
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Benefits:

- Increases HDL ("good") cholesterol
 - Improves blood circulation
 - Lowers blood pressure, blood sugar, and inflammation
 - Improves endurance and stamina
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Examples:

- Running, dancing, swimming, skiing, soccer, basketball
 - Aerobic: long-distance running, cycling, rowing
 - Anaerobic: HIIT workouts, tabata, sprinting
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Mobility

Description: movement that improves how a joint moves or its range of motion

Benefits:

- Decreases muscle soreness
 - Prevents injuries, including muscle strain and muscle and joint pain
 - Relaxes the nervous system
 - Enhances natural movement, posture, and breathing
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Examples:

- Dynamic stretching: taking a joint or muscle through a repetitive motion (often used for warm-ups before exercise)
- Static stretching: sustaining a stretch for about 30–60 seconds (often used for cooldowns after exercise)
- Self-myofascial release (foam rolling): using foam rollers or other trigger point rollers and balls as “self-massage”

Strength

Description: movement that overloads muscles and helps them grow stronger

- Functional training: performing exercises that simulate common movement patterns used in daily life
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Benefits:

- Decreases risk for type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity
 - Increases bone density, muscle mass, metabolism, and insulin sensitivity
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Examples:

- Bodyweight exercises (planks, push-ups, lunges)
 - Dumbbells and barbells
 - Pilates and yoga
 - Resistance bands
 - Strength machines
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All four categories of movement improve not only daily functioning but overall quality of life! The key to well-rounded fitness is including a mix of cardiovascular, strength, mobility, and balance activities, allowing you to move more easily and more effectively in a greater variety of ways.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TIPS

One of the most important things to remember is that your physical activity routine doesn't have to be all or nothing. Remove the pressure to get in a "workout," and simply enjoy moving your body! Try dancing around your bedroom, doing a quick sun salutation, or trying a few squats or push-ups while waiting for your coffee or tea to brew. It's free, it only takes a minute or two, and you'll feel the benefits right away.

Modern cultures are becoming more and more sedentary, which contributes to an increased risk for cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes. Think about it: Even if you go to the gym for an hour every day, how do you spend your other waking hours? Small movements throughout the day add up and can significantly impact how your body uses energy.

Read on for some basic physical activity tips.



TAP INTO THE POWER OF MIND-SET.

Your mind-set can play a big role in your success. Here are a few tips to tap into it.

- **Visualize and affirm.** While setting goals can help some people stay motivated, visualization and affirmation can also be helpful. Seeing yourself exercising, being fit, and feeling great while reframing your self-talk to reflect this positive visual can be the key to moving beyond a momentary stall in motivation.
- **Redefine “exercise.”** You might have to let go of what you define as “exercise”; movement of any kind has its benefits. Short spurts, long runs, playing a sport, walking with a friend, climbing the steps, dancing, even vacuuming – just because you didn’t “make it to the gym” doesn’t mean you can’t have an active day.
- **Connect with your motivation.** Connect your activities and physical goals to your mental, emotional, and spiritual goals. For example, feeling physically stronger can boost your confidence. Feeling more physically flexible can help you feel more mentally flexible. Yoga is known for its spiritual foundation, while hiking is known for its restorative and energizing qualities.

You can also connect your activities and physical goals to other life goals. How might feeling more “in shape” support your career? How might feeling less stiff and in pain affect your relationships?

Your body is what carries you through the day. The more vital it feels, the more it can support you in every area of your life.



RECOGNIZE THE BIO-INDIVIDUALITY OF YOUR PHYSICAL BODY.

You know your body better than anyone, so if something doesn't seem right to you, modify it to meet your needs. It's easy to feel pressure to do what those around you are doing, especially when you're working out in a group setting. Find a pace that works for you and adjust your workout to your needs.

One aspect of honoring bio-individuality is respecting your daily rhythms. This can also help avoid exercise plateaus. Are you a morning person? Use that extra energy and consider adding a workout to your morning routine. Do you find yourself losing concentration in the afternoon? Maybe a brisk walk at this point can help you refocus your thoughts. Begin to notice your body's cycles during the day and see how you can use them to your advantage.

Honoring bio-individuality also means recognizing that you're constantly changing. What works for you today might not work for you next week, next month, or next year. Certain forms of exercise may work for you in different stages of your life, so be patient and check in with yourself often.



Which activities or types of exercise feel more “natural” to you?



TRY THE NEAT APPROACH.

The benefits of physical activity are most effective when exercise is unstructured and incorporated into daily life.

NEAT, or non-exercise activity thermogenesis, is all the energy you expend when you're not eating, sleeping, or doing structured exercise.

There are many ways to increase NEAT, including walking, gardening, dancing around the kitchen, stretching while watching television, cleaning, and even fidgeting! The beauty of NEAT is that it doesn't require adding more time to your day; you can squeeze in small amounts of movement anytime, anyplace.

Here are some NEAT ideas:

- **Stretch More**

- Start your day with 5–10 minutes of stretching or yoga.
- Stretch as you watch TV or work on your computer.
- Try seated stretches at your desk.
- Take two-minute stretch breaks throughout your day.

- **Walk More**

- Set a target step goal using a pedometer, smartphone, or smartwatch.
- Park a little farther away from store entrances or get off the subway one stop early.
- Have walking meetings or consider your lunch a “movement break.”
- Stroll around your apartment or office space while talking on the phone. (This can also promote creative thinking!)



CONNECT WITH YOUR BREATH.

When you exercise, your lungs bring oxygen into the body for energy and remove carbon dioxide and the heart pumps oxygen to your muscles. Regular exercise strengthens your lungs and improves circulation and respiratory efficiency, which means your body will require less oxygen.

However, your lungs aren't the most important breathing muscle. The diaphragm, a dome-shaped muscle at the base of the lungs, is the most efficient breathing muscle and the primary muscle used when breathing in.

Lack of diaphragmatic breathing can lead to muscle imbalances and strain. For example, if the diaphragm isn't working optimally, other muscles kick in to help, leading to muscle pain, primarily in the neck, shoulders, and upper back.

Learning how to use your breath effectively can support physical activity by:

- Aligning the body
- Allowing increased oxygen flow, waste removal, and nutrient delivery to tissues
- Calming you down and enhancing your mood
- Improving concentration
- Increasing mobility
- Increasing stamina, power, and athletic performance
- Lowering blood pressure and slowing heart rate
- Stabilizing and connecting you to your core

Practice Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing is an easy exercise that can be done anywhere. Not only does it help the body use oxygen more efficiently and prevent muscle pain and strain, it also calms and relieves stress!

You might find it easier to begin lying on your back, but you can also do this sitting or standing. If lying on your back, be sure your knees are supported.

- 1| Place one hand on your chest, with your thumb pointing up in the middle of your chest and your pinkie in the space between your rib cage.
- 2| Place your other hand on one side of your rib cage, with your fingers pointing toward your midline.
- 3| Exhale completely through your mouth, relaxing your muscles.
- 4| Close your mouth and inhale slowly through your nose. Pull the air in deeply, as you breathe into your abdomen.
 - Focus first on allowing your ribs to expand out to the sides. This creates more space for the diaphragm to move.
 - The hand on your ribs should move out to the side, and your pinkie should move away from your body.
- 5| When you've inhaled as much air as you comfortably can, pause, then exhale slowly and steadily through your mouth.
 - Use pursed lips, as if you're blowing through a straw, to push the air out and "deflate" the diaphragm.
 - The hand on your ribs should move in toward your midline, and your pinkie should move in toward your body.
- 6| Pause momentarily before inhaling again to repeat, continuing the exercise for 5–10 minutes.

Creating a Routine

Diaphragmatic breathing takes practice, so be patient with yourself.

Here are a few tips:

- Don't try too hard as this does the opposite of calm you down.
- Focus on tuning into deeper, calmer rhythms, which can help the relaxation response kick in.

Aim to practice for 5–10 minutes once or twice daily. Choosing the same time every day creates a sense of ritual and increases the odds that you'll develop the habit of practicing consistently.



ADOPT A PREVENTIVE APPROACH.

Have you ever pushed through a run even though your ankle really hurt or ignored that deep, nagging pain in your hip that's been going on for months? Pushing through pain and ignoring your body can lead to injury.

Exercise injuries are incredibly common, but they're often avoidable. By listening to your body and respecting your needs, you can avoid injuries.

Here are a few preventive tips:

- **Prioritize recovery.** Make sure you're getting enough sleep, and take at least one day off from exercise per week. Giving your muscles one day of complete rest helps them repair and rebuild.
- **Stretch before and after exercise.** A frozen rubber band snaps if pulled, while a warm rubber band can stretch much farther and is more flexible. Your muscles are the same. Warm up by actively stretching them out before diving into vigorous exercise, and cool down with static stretching (holding each stretch for 20–30 seconds).
- **Listen to your body.** If you're in serious pain, don't force a workout. Muscling through will do much more harm than good. If you've been experiencing low-grade pain for a while but have brushed it off, get it checked out. Waiting may put you at risk for a more serious injury. Finally, if you're sick, take time to recover. Sometimes a walk outside can support health, but pushing yourself too hard can prolong a cold or flu.



EAT FOR ENERGY.

Whole, nutrient-dense foods nourish and protect your body more than calories from highly processed foods, which offer energy but contain little nutrition. To reap more benefits from physical activity, include a variety of whole foods in your diet.

Here are a few tips to eat for energy:

- **Maintain bone health through diet.** Consuming plenty of calcium from green vegetables, small fish (like sardines), and dairy – if your body can handle it – helps maintain strong bones and protect you from injury.
- **Nourish your body.** Your body needs the right fuel to function. Protein, carbohydrates, and fats are the building blocks that make up every cell, bone, and muscle in your body and give you the energy to move. Consuming adequate calories and nutrients supports strength and reduces the risk of injury.
- **Reduce inflammation.** Exercise, especially vigorous exercise, can cause inflammation, but you can help reduce it by including a variety of anti-inflammatory foods in your diet, like turmeric, berries, salmon, and dark, leafy greens. (For a non-dietary approach, try an Epsom salt bath, which is anti-inflammatory and can relieve muscle tension and soreness.)

Here are some snacks to give your body real nutritional support – before and after exercise:

Pre-Workout Ideas

- Green smoothie
- Banana with almond butter
- Multigrain crackers with hummus
- Oatmeal with berries
- Apple with walnuts

Post-Workout Ideas

- Salad with roasted chickpeas, extra-virgin olive oil, and vinegar
- Quinoa with blackberries and pecans
- Multigrain bread with raw peanut butter and honey
- Southwestern omelet with vegetables
- Brown rice with black beans and avocado
- Greek yogurt with a handful of nuts
- Broiled salmon with baked sweet potato fries
- Tempeh with sautéed vegetables



GET STARTED.

When you move, your body releases endorphins that help improve your mood and boost your energy levels. Many times, simply getting started is enough to persuade your body to keep moving!

Put on your sneakers. Tell yourself that you don't have to exercise – you just have to put on your shoes and get outside. Put a yoga mat on the floor and stand in Mountain Pose. Tell yourself that you don't have to do anything more than that.

Mountain Pose (Tadasana)

- Stand tall, feet together or hip-width apart. Keep your weight balanced evenly between your feet.
- Imagine your body growing taller: Lift from your inner ankles and kneecaps all the way up to the top of your head.
- Lengthen your tailbone down toward the floor.
- Press your shoulder blades down and lift your chest, widening your collarbones.
- Keep your chin parallel to the floor and your neck in line with your shoulders, hips, and ankles.
- Let your arms hang loosely by your sides.
- Relax your jaw, throat, and eyes.

