

HealthTalk: Getting Regular Exercise

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Q: I get the government’s weekly recommended amount of physical activity (150 minutes, moderate activity and strength training on 2 days). Does it matter whether it’s all on the weekend or spread throughout the week?

A: First, bravo for getting the recommended amount of physical activity! Physical activity acts in many different ways to improve your health, sense of well-being and energy. If you are focused on burning calories for weight management, the average over a week’s time is what seems to count. However, you might miss out on some important additional benefits by concentrating physical activity in just two sequential days. For example, high levels of the hormone insulin seem to act like a growth factor promoting cancer development, but physical activity can reduce excessive levels of the insulin. And studies show that physical activity’s action on insulin levels lasts from 24 to 72 hours. That’s why the American Diabetes Association recommends that you don’t go more than two consecutive days without some physical activity. Furthermore, other health benefits of physical activity, including its positive impact on mood, energy and concentration, do not seem able to be stockpiled a week at a time. Perhaps you mean that the weekend is the only time that you “exercise” – as in sports or yard work. That’s fine, but you can also walk or bicycle instead of drive on an errand, turn on some music and dance, or just take a walk for even 10 to 15 minutes once or twice every day in addition to enjoying larger periods of activity on the weekend. Remember that while 30 minutes a day is the recommended minimum for good health, health benefits are even greater when you work up to an hour a day of moderate activity (or 30 minutes of vigorous activity like running or more intense sports).

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The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) is the cancer charity that fosters research on the relationship of nutrition, physical activity and weight management to cancer risk, interprets the scientific literature and educates the public about the results. It has contributed more than \$91 million for innovative research conducted at universities, hospitals and research centers across the country. AICR has published two landmark reports that interpret the accumulated research in the field and is committed to a process of continuous review. AICR also provides a wide range of educational programs to help millions of Americans learn to make dietary changes for lower cancer risk. Its award-winning New American Plate program is presented in brochures, seminars and on its website, www.aicr.org. AICR is a member of the World Cancer Research Fund International.