

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HEALTH, NUTRITION AND FITNESS



FOCUS ON THE FAMILY® FAMILY HEALTH CHALLENGE

“Long life to you! Good health to you and your household!
And good health to all that is yours!” (1 Samuel 25:6, NIV)

The mission of Focus on the Family is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in disseminating the gospel of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible, and, specifically, to accomplish that objective by helping to preserve traditional values and the institution of the family.



What You Need to Know

Before you begin the Challenge, you should talk to your doctor or health professional — indeed, this is a wise idea before beginning any new health and fitness regimen.

Recent statistics suggest that far too many of us, including an alarming number of our youngest and oldest citizens, seem determined to avoid moving our muscles. A 1996 consensus statement published by the National Institutes of Health indicated that about one in four adults has what is called a sedentary lifestyle. For these people, leisure activity rarely, if ever, includes vigorous or even moderate exercise. This is not to say they are lazy. They may put in 12-hour (or longer) workdays, diligently care for children, be active in community and church affairs, and feel very short on time. (Indeed, their wall-to-wall schedule may be the primary obstacle to any pursuit of physical fitness.) Another third of the adult population carries on some degree of leisure-time physical activity — but not enough to gain any health benefits.

Consistency counts. In order to obtain — and maintain — health benefits, moderate physical activity should be on the agenda every day — or nearly every day. The weekend warrior who shuns exercise during the week and then goes “pedal to the metal” on Saturday, pushing heart and muscles to their limit, is likely to strain, sprain or break something sooner or later. More importantly, he or she is less likely to reap the health benefits of physical activity than the person who puts forth more consistent but less vigorous effort.

Exercise can provide enriching experiences for families. Aside from setting a positive example, parents who join their children in age-appropriate physical activities are able to build some powerful memories. Walks, bike rides, hikes, swimming, skiing and other vigorous pursuits in which the entire family participates can provide wonderful opportunities to interact, share good times (and challenges), and forge powerful bonds.

(Dr. Paul Reisser, *Complete Guide to Family Health, Nutrition & Fitness*, Ch. 7)

What’s Keeping You from Exercising?

If sports and vigorous daily workouts are as natural to you as breathing, you can skip this part (or read it to help your less enthusiastic spouse, child or friend). The other 98 percent of you need to read on. Many people do not feel any great affinity for exercise.

Maybe you don’t have such a negative opinion of exercise, but you just don’t have the time. Getting up before the dawn’s early light to sweat and strain may sound about as appealing as a daily root canal. At the end of a long day of work, whether at home or across town, you may have just enough energy left to prepare dinner, help with homework, get kids to bed and prepare for whatever activities tomorrow’s page on the calendar may announce — not to mention attending evening meetings for church, school or continuing education. Who has the fortitude to hit the streets long after the sun has gone down or when the weather is foul? Who has the energy to climb onto the treadmill or exercise bicycle at the end of a long day, when climbing into bed sounds much more appealing? Obviously, some do; but for all too many of us, becoming physically fit looks like a real uphill battle.

You’ll be happy to know that you don’t need to rearrange your entire life or spend thousands of dollars on fitness hardware in order to benefit from exercise. However, if physical exertion isn’t your cup of tea, you may need to make some adjustments in four key areas: your motivation, schedule, creativity and, yes, self-discipline.

Make changes gradually in order to prevent injuries, fatigue and discouragement. If you normally walk for 30 minutes, for example, you may discover some new unhappy muscles if you suddenly jump to 60 minutes. You would be better off increasing the time of your walk by three to five minutes each week. If you are regularly walking two miles in 40 minutes and want to speed things up, don’t expect to jog or run the

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entire distance. Instead, after you have warmed up, try alternating jogging and walking every two or three minutes. As your stamina improves, you will be able to increase either the amount of time you spend jogging, or your pace, or both.

The same principle applies to other aerobic exercise, whether riding a bicycle (moving or stationary), swimming, using a stair-climber machine and so on. Remember that your purpose is not to push yourself to a near-death experience. If you feel faint, dizzy or simply unable to press on, *slow down or stop* until you are ready to continue (or, if necessary, call it quits for the day). Ideally you will find a cruising speed at which your breathing can comfortably keep up with your body's increased need for oxygen for longer and longer periods of time.
(Dr. Paul Reisser, *Complete Guide to Family Health, Nutrition & Fitness*, Ch. 7)

With very rare exceptions, it is much more dangerous to lead a sedentary life than to embark on a program of regular moderate exercise. A second reminder is equally important: You are more likely to be injured trying to jump-start your exercise by doing too much too fast, or by trying to cram high-intensity workouts into one or two days per week (or month).
(Dr. Paul Reisser, *Complete Guide to Family Health, Nutrition & Fitness*, Ch. 7)

Warning!

Aches and pains, strains and sprains. It should go without saying that exercise involves repetitive movements of muscles and joints, including some we may not know exist until we begin using them. When we ask muscles to work above and beyond their usual levels, we can expect some aching for a day or two. This pain is usually mild and diffuse, rather than focused in a single area, and shouldn't interfere with normal activities. The aching may actually feel good, an acknowledgment of our recent increase in activity.

But more severe pain that is focused in one area, especially when it causes limping or difficulty moving some part of the body, is a warning that should not be ignored. Strains, sprains and ruptures occur so quickly and create such dramatic pain that the need for medical attention is obvious. Less intense pain may not get our attention right away, but is still important.
(Dr. Paul Reisser, *Complete Guide to Family Health, Nutrition & Fitness*, Ch. 7)

Special concerns for diabetics. People with Type I diabetes (who require insulin shots every day) will need to find the right balance between food, insulin and exercise to avoid hypoglycemic (low blood sugar) episodes. Careful tracking of blood sugar using a glucose monitor — which already should be part of the daily routine for those with this problem — is particularly important to follow a diabetic's response to exercise.

Because all adult diabetics, whether I or II, have a higher risk of developing coronary artery disease, screening for this problem should be discussed with a physician before beginning an exercise program. Properly fitting shoes are also a must for diabetics, whose feet may be more vulnerable to skin breakdown and infection because of poor circulation and reduced pain sensations.
(Dr. Paul Reisser, *Complete Guide to Family Health, Nutrition & Fitness*, Ch. 7)