

## Is 30 minutes of exercise a day enough?

You may not need to work out as much as you thought you do to live a long and healthy life

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For anyone interested in the relationship between exercise and living longer, one of the most pressing questions is: How much do we really need to do to stay healthy? Is 30 minutes a day enough? Can we get by with less? Do we have to exercise all in one session, or can we spread it throughout the day? And when we're talking about exercise, does it have to be intense?



For years, exercise scientists tried to quantify the ideal 'dose' of exercise for most people. They reached a broad consensus of 150 minutes of moderate exercise every week, and half as much if it is intense. But what's the best way to space out those weekly minutes? And what does 'moderate' mean? Here's what some of the leading researchers in exercise science have to say:

**Aim for the 150-minute sweet spot**

"For longevity, 150 minutes a week of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity clearly is enough," said Dr I-Min Lee, a professor of epidemiology at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, US.

For practical purposes, exercise scientists often recommend breaking that 150 minutes into 30-minute sessions of speedy walking or a similar activity five times a week. "It is quite clear from numerous large-scale, wellconducted epidemiological studies that 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity most days lowers the risk of premature death and many diseases, such as stroke, heart attack, Type-2 diabetes and many types of cancer," said Ulf Ekelund, a professor specialising in physical activity epidemiology at the Norwegian School of Sports Sciences in Oslo, who has led many of those studies.

Moderate exercise, he continued, means "activities that increase your breathing and heart rate, so the exertion feels like a five or six on a scale between one and 10". In other words, pick up the pace a bit if your inclination is to stroll, but do not feel compelled to sprint.

**Consider exercise snacks**

You also can break up your exercise into even smaller segments. "It doesn't matter whether exercise is done in a long, continuous 30-minute session or is dispersed across the day in shorter sessions," said Emmanuel Stamatakis, an exercise scientist at the University of Sydney in Australia who studies physical activity and health.

Recent studies show that we can accumulate our 150 weekly minutes of moderate exercise in whatever way works best for us, he said. "Many people may find it easier and more sustainable to squeeze in a few dozen one-minute or two-minute walks between work tasks" or other commitments. "There is no special magic to a sustained 30-minute session of exercise" for most health benefits.

Think of these bite-size workouts as exercise snacks, he said. "Activities like bursts of very fast walking, stair climbing and carrying shopping bags provide excellent opportunities for movement snacks."

**Count your steps**

The exercise recommendations remain the same if you measure your exercise in steps instead of minutes. For most people, "150 minutes of exercise a week would translate into about 7,000 to 8,000 steps a day", Lee said. In a large-scale new study by Lee and Ekelund, on the relationship between steps and longevity, published in March in The Lancet, the optimal step count for people younger than 60 was about 8,000 to 10,000 a day, and for those 60 and older, it was about 6,000 to 8,000 a