

Move for a healthy heart

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A sedentary or physically inactive lifestyle increases a person's risk for heart disease, as well as many other conditions and ailments. As the country observes Philippine Heart Month, it is important to emphasize the vital role of regular physical activity in maintaining a healthy heart.



The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that children and adolescents aged five to 17 years should do at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity daily, and activities that strengthen muscle and bone, at least three times a week. Adults aged 18 to 64 years should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or do at least 75 minutes of vigorous intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both. For additional health benefits, adults should increase their moderate intensity physical activity to 300 minutes a week, or equivalent. Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups on two or more days a week.

Adults aged 65 years and above should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or at least 75 minutes of vigorous intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both. For additional health benefits, they should increase moderate intensity physical activity to 300 minutes a week, or equivalent. Those with poor mobility should perform physical activity to enhance balance and prevent falls, three or more days a week. Muscledstrengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups, two or more days a week.

Moderate intensity physical activities include brisk walking, water aerobics, dancing, gardening, tennis, and biking. Vigorous intensity physical activities include hiking uphill or with a heavy backpack, running, swimming laps, vigorous aerobic dancing, heavy yard-work such as continuous digging or hoeing, tennis, cycling and jumping rope.

However, the first WHO "Global status report on physical activity" released in October 2022 revealed that many Filipinos, particularly adolescents, are sedentary. About one in three (30%) Filipino men 18 to 69 years old, almost half (49%) of Filipino women 18 to 69

years old and over 90% of Filipino adolescents 11 to 17 years old do not meet the WHO's recommended levels of physical activity. Among Filipinos aged 70 and older, 44% of males and 65% of females do not measure up to the WHO standard.

Inadequate physical activity is likely one of the reasons why about 27 million Filipinos are overweight and obese, based on the latest survey of the Department of Science and Technology (DoST) Food and Nutrition Research Institute. For the past two decades, excessive weight and obesity among Filipino adults has almost doubled from 20.2% in 1998 to 36.6% in 2019. Excessive weight and obesity among Filipino adolescents have more than doubled from 4.9% in 2003 to 11.6% in 2018. If no action is taken, the overall rates of excessive weight and obesity will continue to rise, with more than 30% of Filipino adolescents projected to be overweight and obese by 2030.

Furthermore, a sedentary lifestyle among many Filipinos, coupled with other risk factors such as unhealthy food choices and tobacco use, contribute to the heavy burden of cardiovascular diseases — diseases of the heart and blood vessels — which account for a third of deaths in the Philippines. Coronary heart disease, also known as ischemic heart disease, is one type of cardiovascular disease involving heart damage caused by narrowed heart arteries. Coronary heart disease was the leading cause of death in the country in 2023, claiming the lives of nearly 108,000 Filipinos or 19% of the total deaths in the country that year.

The American Heart Association (AHA) advises people not to let all-or-nothing thinking keep them from doing what they can every day, stressing that any amount of movement is better than none. The simplest way to get moving and improve your health is to start walking — it's free, easy and can be done just about anywhere, even in place, says the AHA. For example, taking a brisk walk for five or 10 minutes a few times a day will add up.

Experts recommend simple but effective ways to incorporate physical activity in your daily routine. These include taking the stairs instead of the elevator when going one or two floors up, and climbing instead of riding the escalator. Parking your vehicle farther away from your destination, and washing your car at home instead of taking it to the carwash will also be helpful. Further, jogging in place, lifting weights, or walking on the treadmill while watching TV can be beneficial. Walking or biking when running errands is also one of the recommendations. Finally, planning family outings that involve being active, like hiking, swimming or outdoor games can be effective for members of the family.

People with a chronic condition such as hypertension or heart disease, or disability should consult their doctor first about what types and amounts of physical activity are right for them before starting any physical or exercise regimen. ■

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