

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FACT SHEET

Developed by the National Latina Health Network

Why is physical activity important?

Physical activity is necessary to maintain a healthy body and to prevent the onset of chronic diseases. Physical activity can also be used to control obesity, which has become an overwhelming epidemic in the Latino community in the past 20 years.

In 2000 alone, health care costs connected to physical inactivity totaled over \$76 billion dollars. Being physically active for as little as 30 minutes a day, five times a week, could help keep you and your family healthy.

Physical Activity as a Prevention Method

Physical activity plays an important role in preventing serious and life-threatening diseases. By participating in regular physical activity, you can reduce your and your family's risk of premature death, plus promote a healthier lifestyle. Here are a few reasons that physical activity should become a part of your daily routine:

- Reduces the risk of developing coronary heart disease.
- Lowers the risk of stroke.
- Reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure as well as reduces blood pressure in those with hypertension.
- Helps prevent the onset of Type 2 diabetes, which is prevalent among Latinos.
- Can help with weight loss and controlling obesity.
- Reduces feelings of stress, depression, and anxiety.

The Impact of Physical Inactivity

What is the impact of physical inactivity on the Latina/o community?

- Among Hispanics/Latinos, 49.9 percent of men and 57.1 percent of women are physically inactive.
- Hispanic/Latino youth and African-American youth are less active than non-Hispanic white youth.
- In 2001, 59.0 percent of the Latino community was considered overweight or obese, compared to 55.0 percent of whites.
- Approximately 30 percent of children (ages six to 11) and adolescents (ages 12 to 19) are overweight; 15 percent are obese.
- Physical activity is a key component to preventing heart disease and stroke, the number one killer of Latinos in the United States.
- Women, ethnic minority groups, and people over the age of 45, are most likely to be physically inactive.

As a result, the economic impact of physical inactivity can be substantial.

Between 1997-1999, annual hospital costs relating to obesity among children and adolescents rose to \$127 million dollars. If only ten percent of adults were to begin a regular walking/exercise program, \$5.6 billion could be saved on heart disease-related costs.

How does physical inactivity affect my family?

Physical activity is both a prevention method for certain chronic diseases and a fun way to spend time with your family. Thirty minutes a day, five times a week can greatly improve the health of your family and bring you closer together. Here are some ways your family can engage in physical activity together:

- Begin a routine of fast-paced walking or bike riding after dinner together with family or friends.
- Explore your neighborhood park and its trails, or play a sport together.
- If you live in an urban area, instead of driving to your destination, ask your family to join you for a walk.
- Encourage your child(ren) to enroll in a sport, whether in-school or after-school, and practice with him or her.

Recommendations for Physical Activity

According to the American Heart Association, “Even low-to-moderate intensity activities, when done for as little as 30 minutes a day, can bring benefits.” Some of these activities include walking for pleasure, climbing stairs, gardening and yard work, and dancing. Other, more vigorous activities include swimming, bike riding, running, or jogging.

Note: Experts advise that people with chronic diseases, such as a heart condition, arthritis, diabetes, or high blood pressure, should talk to their doctor about what types and amounts of physical activity are appropriate. If you have a chronic disease and have not already done so, talk to your doctor before beginning a new physical activity program. – *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Nutrition & Physical Activity*

Resources

American Heart Association: 1.800.AHA.USA1 (1.800.242.8721); www.americanheart.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): 1.800.311.3435;
www.cdc.gov/health/physact.htm

National Institutes for Health: www.niddk.nih.gov

President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports: 202.690.9000; www.fitness.gov

For more information on physical activity, contact:

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