



Temple University

**Collaborative**

On Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities



# ***Beginning an Exercise Program***

Fact Sheet for Consumers

# Beginning an Exercise Program: Fact Sheet for Consumers

Exercise can be fun! We often start an exercise program because we want to lose weight or improve heart health. These things are important, but it doesn't mean that it has to be boring! In fact, if the outcome is important to you, we recommend you make exercise fun! Consider the things you enjoy doing. Do you like gardening, walking in parks, cooking, playing with kids or pets? These things can be fun and get you moving. By focusing on fun activities, you are more willing to maintain the motivation which often declines quickly when we do exercise routines that are boring. Going to the gym is a great way to improve your health, but it's not the only way. This fact sheet offers information about the benefits of exercise, strategies to use to be successful, and recommended amounts of weekly physical activity.

## Ways to exercise in your community

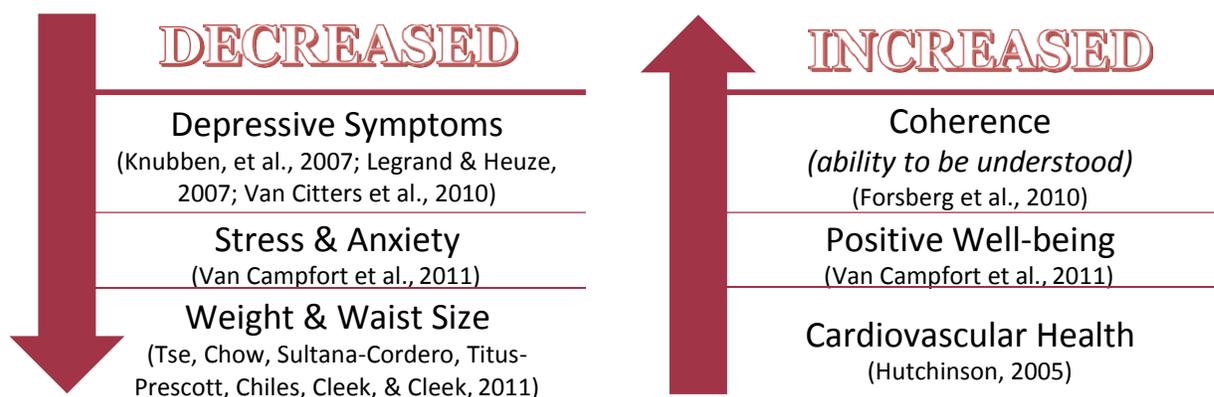
Exercising doesn't require an expensive gym membership. Communities often have free activities to help neighbors stay active.

- Look for free fitness classes. Libraries, local parks and recreation facilities, and even churches often offer free fitness classes.
- Practice at home. Use exercise videos which can be borrowed from the library or purchased cheaply at thrift stores. You can also find free exercise videos on YouTube and television.
- Local parks and recreation centers and YMCAs often have scholarships. Some gyms, like Planet Fitness, have low monthly fees. Stop in your local gym and ask about fees and scholarships.
- There are many groups that gather for free exercises in parks and cities. Go on-line to research free groups that interest you (for example: running clubs, walking groups).

## Benefits of Exercise

Individuals with psychiatric disabilities can experience both mental and physical health benefits of exercise. Research indicates that exercise can lead to:

Table 1. Research Findings Linked To Physical Activity



## Planning an Exercise Program

If you're unsure of how to begin an exercise program, you are not alone. Many people stumble before they even begin by not preparing. Table 2 provides recommendations to get you started on your path.

Table 2. Recommendations for Beginning an Exercise Program

Recommendation	Description
Set & Monitor Goals	Set your goals. To set fitness goals, ask yourself some questions. How many days per week do you have time to exercise? What would you like to achieve? How will you record your achievements?
Share Goals	After you have set goals, consider sharing them with your mental health providers, family members, and friends. These people can encourage you and even exercise with you, making the experience more fun.
Identify Barriers	Everyone experiences barriers. What issues will you face when you begin exercising? Money, transportation, motivation and lack of knowledge about activities are all common barriers. Consider your barriers and how you will overcome them.
Identify Facilitators	It's important to recognize the things and people that will help you to reach your goals. Friends, family and fun activities can provide motivation to exercise. Consider the things that will help you to be successful.
Focus on interest	Many people view exercise as a chore or simply something that has to be done. By choosing an activity that is fun, you are more likely to enjoy and continue your exercise routine.
Don't get discouraged!	Beginning an exercise program can be difficult! Use every success as a motivation to stay engaged. When setbacks occur, re-evaluate barriers and facilitators and consider additional ways that you can be successful.

## Achieving Recommended Activity Levels

### Assessing Current Physical Activity

Before starting an exercise program, it's important to understand your current levels of physical activity. It is also important to talk with your doctor about your current activity level and fitness goals.

There are many ways to determine how physically active you are. You might start a physical activity diary to record the amount of time you spend in physical activities during a typical week. When updating your physical activity diary, consult the Activity Intensity Levels section (below) to determine intensity levels of each activity.

Pedometers can also be used to record physical activity levels. These are small plastic fitness trackers that can be attached to your belt to count the amount of steps you take in a day. Many insurance companies will provide free pedometers to encourage physical fitness. They can also be purchased at many drugstores for less than \$5.00. Accelerometers are similar to pedometers, except that in addition to steps, they also track the intensity of activities. These are also generally more expensive. There are also many smart phone apps that you can download to track your steps. Many are free.

### Activity Intensity Levels

Activity levels are typically divided into sedentary, light, moderate, and vigorous. Table 3 provides a list of activities divided by their physical intensity level.

**Table 3. Activities by intensity level**

<b>Intensity Level</b>	<b>Sedentary</b>	<b>Light</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Vigorous</b>
<b>What it looks like</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• require little to no energy</li> <li>• often occur when seated or reclined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• require some energy</li> <li>• no significant changes in breathing, allow for you to comfortably carry on a conversation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• require moderate amount of energy</li> <li>• increased breathing allows for talking, but not singing due to increased breathing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requires a large amount of energy</li> <li>• increased breathing which limits talking to a few words before pausing to take a breath</li> </ul>
<b>Examples of Activities</b>	Sleeping, Watching TV, Reading, Sitting & Writing, Sitting & listening to music, Using a computer	Washing dishes, Shopping, Putting away groceries, Driving, Walking at a slow pace, Billiards, Darts	Walking stairs (normal pace), Brisk walking, Golf, Frisbee, Shooting basketballs, Table tennis/ping-pong, Vacuuming, Sweeping	Jogging, Running, Playing basketball, Playing handball, Jumping rope, Sports that involve running

### Physical Activity Guidelines

Below are the recommended amounts of physical activity for every person. You will begin to see health benefits when you participate in activities at or above these weekly recommendations, which include aerobic activity and muscle strengthening activities. Aerobic activities increase your heart rate. This may include traditional exercise or even housekeeping activities such as vacuuming or sweeping. In order to have activities count towards the total minutes, individuals should strive for participating in activities that last at least 10 minutes.

#### Weekly Recommendations of Physical Activity (DHHS, 2008)

2 hours & 30 minutes (150 minutes) of *Moderate* intensity activity

OR

1 hour & 15 minutes (75 minutes) of *Vigorous* intensity activity

OR

An equivalent mix of *Moderate* and *Vigorous* intensity activities

AND

A minimum of 2 days of muscle strengthening activities

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