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## 5 tips for staying healthy outdoors

After a long year indoors due to COVID-19, many of us have snacked more and moved less. Access to the kitchen may be easier than access to a workout class, but don't let that stop you from reaching your fitness goals! Take advantage of rising temperatures and longer days by exercising outdoors. Not only will you maintain your physical fitness, but moving amongst nature will greatly benefit your mind. Consistent exposure to 10-30 minutes of sunlight each day can help maintain strong bones, strengthen your immune system, fight off depression, and improve your sleep. Studies show you'll feel happier, reduce stress, and likely get in a better workout than you would have exercising indoors. Well, what are you waiting for? Check out these 5 simple tips for staying active outdoors.

### **Create a routine**

The easiest way to make exercise a daily habit is to set a time for your workout, and stick to it. If you don't set a time, you're more likely to put it off until later...or the next day. Soon, it's no longer a habit. That being said, be realistic! Choose a time that seamlessly makes fitness part of your daily schedule. Remember, you can always break your exercise into chunks throughout the day as long as you keep a running tab of how many minutes you have exercised to ensure you are meeting your goals.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that generally fit Americans aged 65 and older should aim for 150 minutes of moderate endurance activity per week in addition to a variety of strength, balance, and flexibility exercises. This comes out to about 20 minutes of endurance activity per day, which is as simple to accomplish as walking your dog or working in the garden!

### **Use what you have**

No need to worry about going to the gym when your backyard is full of possibilities! Aside from proper footwear to support your activities, you don't need any special equipment. You would be surprised how much you can accomplish with a few canned goods or water bottles, a towel, and a chair! The best piece of equipment you can have is your own body. Get creative!

### **Mix it up**

Rather than performing the same type of activity every day, research shows that practicing a variety of endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility exercises better allow your body to recover, prevent injury, and prevent weight loss plateauing.



Endurance activities increase your breathing and heart rate. These activities are crucial for keeping your lungs and circulatory system healthy, and can help prevent many diseases common in older adults such as diabetes and heart disease. Take yourself (or your pet!) on a brisk walk, go for a bike ride, or do some yard work. Pushing a lawn mower, raking, and shoveling snow are all great ways to build cardiovascular endurance! Always remember to warm up and cool down with light activity to prevent injuries.

Muscular strength makes a big difference in everyday activities. Light, intermittent resistance training can help avoid losing muscle mass and prevent frailty by stimulating the growth of muscle and increasing bone density. Grab a few canned goods or light weights and start with simple exercises such as bicep curls, shoulder raises, or squats. Perform 2-3 sets of 10-15 repetitions. Aim to incorporate strength activities into your fitness routine 2-3 times a week for best results. If the movement feels painful or the intensity is too high, stop; listen to your body!

Balance and flexibility exercises such as Tai Chi, yoga, and stretching will help you move more freely and prevent injuries. Practicing these activities outdoors can heighten your experience by replenishing depleted energy and providing a sense of calmness. Reduced stress allows for deeper stretches and increased focus within your practice. Balance and flexibility activities are also great ways to cool down and recover after performing an endurance or strength workout. Check out local, socially distanced outdoor classes for some comradery or find a Zoom class you can log into from the comfort of your own backyard!

### **Keep it simple**

If exercising is not already part of your daily routine, chances are your body will not be used to the stress of daily fitness. Start small, find activities you enjoy, and do what you can.

Gradually increase the length and intensity of your workouts at a pace that works for you! Over time you will notice improvement in your performance if you stick with your routine. Do not stress if you are not seeing physical changes right away; the benefits inside your mind and body are still considerable! Aim for consistency over perfection. Focus on working towards long term health goals rather than stressing over short-term progress. Small disciplines and routine changes can really add up to big accomplishments!

### **Stay safe**

No matter how you choose to get active outdoors, do not forget your sunscreen. Choose broad spectrum products that protect against both UVA and UVB rays to shield yourself from sunburn and reduce your risk of sun-related conditions such as skin cancer. Apply liberally before dressing so you are less likely to miss any spots, and protect your eyes and scalp by wearing a hat when possible. Choose a sunscreen that is water resistant if you plan to be working up a sweat. Reapply every two hours at a minimum.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that you do your part by wearing a mask when required. If you plan to head out for a stroll around the neighborhood, maintain your distance! Choose less popular outdoor fitness locations or visit at less frequented times. Also, remember to schedule an annual physical (especially if you had to cancel a previous appointment due to COVID-19) and speak with your physician about any chronic conditions before engaging in any long-term activity.



## Resources

<https://www.verywellfit.com/exercise-and-activity-plan-for-newly-retired-4120207>  
<https://zenhabits.net/how-to-make-exercise-a-daily-habit-with-a-may-challenge/>  
<https://www.healthline.com/health/everyday-fitness/senior-workouts>  
<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/vitamin-d-from-sun>  
<https://selecthealth.org/blog/2020/07/7-health-benefits-of-sunlight>  
<https://www.lappset.com/News-and-updates/Blogs-and-articles/10-reasons-why-outdoor-training-is-better-than-a-gym-workout#:~:text=1.,closer%20to%20your%20maximum%20performance.>  
<https://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/7-reasons-to-sweat-outdoors#1>  
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<https://www.ncoa.org/blog/encouraging-older-adults-to-stay-active-and-safe-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>  
<https://www.fitness19.com/sunscreen-rules-tips-for-outdoor-workouts/>  
<https://www.bannerhealth.com/healthcareblog/advice-me/exercising-outside-during-coronavirus>

