

Physical Activity Pays Off

By Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition and Health Education Specialist

For those whose New Year's resolution was to get fit both physically and financially, a recent study quantified the financial benefit of being physically active.

According to research reported in the [Journal of the American Heart Association](#), following the US Department of Health and Senior Services' recommendations for moderate to vigorous physical activity of 30 minutes or more on five or more days per week, "is associated with significantly lower healthcare spending and resource utilization." The study found that those who were performing the recommended amount of aerobic activity paid approximately \$2500 less in annual health care spending than those not meeting the recommendations. This includes prescription costs, hospitalizations, ER visits, and other expenses. Note that this study shows the link between exercise and lower medical costs, but not necessarily a causal effect.

Being physically active has other benefits as well, including arthritis relief, improved balance, enhanced flexibility, stronger bones, weight control, reduced depression and improved mood, stress reduction, reduced risk for heart disease and other chronic conditions, and maintaining healthy blood glucose levels.

Being physically active has two other major components besides aerobic activity: strengthening and flexibility. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) has set guidelines for older adults for resistance exercise to maximize the benefits. The ACSM recommends "performing at least one set of repetitions for 8-10 exercises that train the major muscle groups." At least one set should be done 2-3 times per week on nonconsecutive days. The resistance for strength training exercises can be created by using hand weights and ankle weights. Increasing the weight increases the resistance and strengthens the muscles.

Flexibility activities include those that stretch muscles and should be done at least twice a week for at least 10 minutes. This could include simple stretches while sitting at a desk or on a sofa, or could be more complex or systematic like yoga or tai chi, or anything in between.

Accomplish two goals at once by being more physically active and saving on healthcare spending.

For more information on how physical activity pays off or any other topic, contact me, Janet Hackert, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local [University of Missouri Extension office](#). University of Missouri Extension - your one-stop source for practical education on almost anything.

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