



What is fitness?

Health for the whole you

You don't have to be an athlete to be fit. Fitness is about taking care of the whole you through activities that strengthen you, body and mind.

To get in better shape, make a fitness routine that includes the 3 components of fitness: aerobic exercise, strength training, and flexibility exercises. Cross-training with more than one activity doesn't just help you get stronger. It reduces your risk of injury, too.

The more active you are, the greater the health benefits.

A healthier body



On days when you'd rather stay in bed than work out, it can be easy to think it won't matter if you skip once...or twice...or more than that. But staying active can mean the difference between living a healthy, happy life and developing chronic health conditions.

Enjoying regular physical activity can help you look and feel great. It improves your balance, flexibility, and posture, and it tones and builds your muscles. As your muscles strengthen, you burn more calories during and after exercise, so it's easier to maintain a healthy weight.

You'll have more energy, and you'll sleep better, too.

But the benefits of staying fit go deeper. Being active:

- reduces your risk of heart disease and stroke
- lowers your blood pressure and raises your "good" artery-clearing HDL cholesterol, which further reduces your risk of cardiovascular disease
- lowers your risk of type 2 diabetes by changing how your body uses sugar
- keeps your bones strong, reducing your risk of osteoporosis
- protects against cancer of the colon, breast, and cervix

Because fitness protects your whole body, it lowers the rates of death from all causes and helps seniors stay independent longer.

A healthier mind

Studies show that working out doesn't just strengthen your body. It can change your brain for the better, too. Staying active can:

- improve your concentration and memory
- lessen depression and improve your mood
- reduce stress and anxiety
- lower the risk of Alzheimer's disease
- lead to the growth of new brain cells

These changes aren't just biological changes, though. There's some evidence that if you expect to feel great after working out, you probably will. Sticking to your fitness routine can teach you that you can achieve your goals, so you'll feel more confident.

Source: Adapted with permission from the Healthy Mind, Healthy Body Handbook (also published under the title Mind & Body Health Handbook), David Sobel, MD, and Robert Ornstein, PhD, 1996.

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Additional Kaiser Permanente reviewers

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