Regular physical activity can lead to better health by reducing obesity and the risk of many chronic diseases. Despite the benefits, less than half of all adults, and about 3 in 10 high school students in the United States, get the recommended daily amounts of physical activity.¹,² This fact sheet provides proven intervention strategies—including programs and services—to increase physical activity in communities. It can help decision makers in both public and private sectors make choices about what intervention strategies are best for their communities.

This fact sheet summarizes information in The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide), an evidence-based resource of what works in public health. Use the information in this fact sheet to help select intervention strategies you can adapt for your community to

- Organize community-wide campaigns about the benefits of being active as part of a broad multicomponent approach.
- Teach people how to change behaviors and develop supportive social environments.
- Combine activities with health education to build family support and increase physical activity among children.
- Make community design changes that support physical activity.

The Community Guide provides evidence-based findings and recommendations from the Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) about preventive services and programs to improve health. The CPSTF—an independent, nonfederal panel of public health and prevention experts—bases its findings on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. Learn more about The Community Guide and what works to increase physical activity by visiting www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/physical-activity.
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Increasing Physical Activity

THE PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

Being active benefits people at all ages

In children and adolescents³⁴
- Improve aerobic and muscular fitness, build healthy bones
- Control weight
- Prevent chronic health problems such as diabetes and heart disease
- May help improve academic performance

In adults⁴
- Control weight
- ↓ Heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes
- ↓ Colorectal and breast cancers
- Improve mental health and mood, ↓ depression

In older adults⁴
- ↑ Bone density, ↓ risk of falling and hip fracture
- Improve ability to do daily activities
- Manage chronic health problems such as diabetes and heart disease
- Improve cognitive function

Many Americans fall short of daily requirements

- Children and adolescents should get at least 1 hour or more of physical activity each day.
- Adults should get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of physical activity each week.
- Adults aged 65 and older who have no limiting health conditions should get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of physical activity each week.

For more information, see the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.

Rates of Physical Inactivity Across the U.S. in 2015*

* Rates represent the percentage of people who reported getting no physical activity in the last month. Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)
SUMMARIZING THE CPSTF FINDINGS

All CPSTF findings for increasing physical activity are available online at www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/physical-activity. Some of the findings are described below.

Campaigns and informational approaches

- **Community-wide campaigns** increase physical activity and improve fitness among adults and children. These large-scale campaigns are sustained efforts with highly visible messages delivered through TV spots, radio ads, newspapers, and movie theater trailers. Multicomponent approaches for information include self-help groups, counseling, risk factor screening, and health education activities at locations and events across the community.

Behavioral and social approaches. Teaching people the skills to change their behavior and providing social support for doing so are recommended to get people more active.

- **Individually adapted health behavior change programs** are tailored to a person's interests and needs. They teach skills like goal-setting and problem-solving to help people incorporate and maintain physical activity in their lives. These programs are shown to increase physical activity and fitness and decrease weight in adults and children.

- **Social support interventions in community settings** focus on building social support networks, such as buddy systems or walking groups. These supportive relationships can help people exercise more often and for longer periods of time.

- **Enhanced school-based physical education** increases the amount of time students spend in moderate- or vigorous-activity physical education classes. The class can be longer, more frequent or daily, or boost activity level.

Family-based interventions combine activities with health education to build family support and increase physical activity among children. Interventions include goal-setting tools to monitor progress, reinforced positive health behaviors, and organized physical activity.

Environmental and policy approaches. Changes to the community’s physical environment provide opportunities, support, and cues to help people to be more active by making it easier and safer for them. Effective approaches for increasing a community’s physical activity levels and fitness include the following:

- **Built environment interventions** combine new or enhanced elements of transportation systems with new or enhanced land use design to make physical activity easier and more accessible. Policies, projects, or designs include street connectivity, sidewalks, bicycle paths, public transit infrastructure, mixed land use environments, and access to parks and other recreational facilities.

- **Creating or enhancing access** to places for physical activity—for example, by developing walking trails and building exercise facilities or providing access to existing exercise facilities.

- **Point-of-decision prompts** (motivational signs) placed in or near stairwells, escalators, or elevators encourage people to take the stairs. These signs are effective in many different settings, including shopping malls, transit stations, and office buildings.

PUTTING THE CPSTF FINDINGS TO WORK

As a public health decision maker, practitioner, community leader, or someone who can influence the health of your community, you can use The Community Guide to create a blueprint for success.

- **Identify your community’s needs.** Review the intervention strategies recommended by the CPSTF and determine which ones best match your needs. Adopt, adapt, or develop evidence-based programs, services, and policies that will facilitate and encourage physical activity in your community.

- **See how other communities have applied the CPSTF recommendations and other intervention strategies for increasing physical activity** at www.thecommunityguide.org/content/the-community-guide-in-action. Get ideas from their success stories.

- **Use CDC's strategies to increase physical activity** at www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity to develop programs for individuals, employers, and communities.

- **Consult the Partnership for Prevention community prevention action guides** at http://www.prevent.org/Initiatives/Action-Guides.aspx for suggestions on putting evidence-based recommendations into practice.

- **Explore physical activity programs at Cancer Control P.L.A.N.E.T.**’s Research-Tested Intervention Programs (RTIPs). These community-based and clinical programs have been evaluated, found to be effective, and published in a peer-reviewed journal. Visit http://rtips.cancer.gov/rtips.
THE COMMUNITY GUIDE IN ACTION

At MD Anderson, Wellness Starts in the Neighborhood
MD Anderson Cancer Center wanted to create an employee wellness program for nearly 20,000 employees spread across its massive Houston campus. The center’s former wellness officer, William B. Baun used evidence-based approaches from The Community Guide to develop tailored wellness programs for each “neighborhood” in the campus. These programs included Be Well stations with workout equipment and social support interventions.

Creating Walkable Communities in Rural North Carolina
In North Carolina, Granville County used recommendations in The Community Guide to plan the development of more walkable communities. The Granville Greenways Master Plan aims to change the built environment to address the climbing rates of obesity and early death from heart disease and diabetes in the county. The greenways encourage active transportation and help people make physical activity part of their daily lives. See a video on Granville’s story at www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BWVRg_49Eg.

Rural Alaskan Community Stays “Fun and Fit”
With a substantial percentage of school children overweight or obese, the small rural community of Hoonah, Alaska, created a network of cross-sector partnerships to increase physical activity and promote better nutrition in the schools and community-wide. Using a combination of recommendations in The Community Guide—including informational, behavioral, and environmental approaches—the Hoonah Fun and Fit Partnership broadened access to recreational activities and events.

Read more on these stories and others at www.thecommunityguide.org/content/the-community-guide-in-action.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Community Guide: Physical Activity
www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/physical-activity

Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, CDC
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao

CDC Vital Signs: More People Walk to Better Health
www.cdc.gov/VitalSigns/Walking

CDC Prevention Research Center: Center for Training and Research Translation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
www.centertrt.org

HHS, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
https://health.gov/paguidelines/

Healthy People 2020 Resources on Physical Activity
www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/overview

REFERENCES


Last updated: September 2017
### CPSTF FINDINGS ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) has released the following findings on what works in public health to increase physical activity. These findings are compiled in The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) and listed in the table below. Use the findings to identify intervention strategies you could use for your community.

Legend for CPSTF Findings:  
- **Recommended**
- **Insufficient Evidence**
- **Recommended Against**  
(See reverse for detailed descriptions.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>CPSTF Finding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavioral and Social Approaches</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College-Based Physical Education and Health Education</td>
<td>![Insufficient Evidence]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-Based Interventions</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced School-Based Physical Education</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individually Adapted Health Behavior Change Programs</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions Including Activity Monitors for Adults with Overweight or Obesity</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support Interventions in Community Settings</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campaigns and Informational Approaches</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-Wide Campaigns</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom-Based Health Education Focused on Providing Information</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand-Alone Mass Media Campaigns</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental and policy Approaches</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built Environment Approaches Combining Transportation System Interventions with Land Use and Environmental Design</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating or Improving Places for Physical Activity</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point-of-Decision Prompts to Encourage Use of Stairs</td>
<td>![Recommended]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each intervention, a summary of the systematic review, included studies, evidence gaps, and journal publications can be found on the Physical Activity section of the website at [www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/physical-activity](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/physical-activity). Other related resources include one pagers and Community Guide in Action stories.

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides administrative, scientific, and technical support for the Community Preventive Services Task Force.*
UNDERSTANDING THE FINDINGS

The CPSTF bases its findings and recommendations on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from CPSTF, scientists and subject matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners. Based on the strength of the evidence, the CPSTF assigns each intervention to one of the categories below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Icon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommended</td>
<td>There is strong or sufficient evidence that the intervention strategy is effective. This finding is based on the number of studies, how well the studies were designed and carried out, and the consistency and strength of the results.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Evidence</td>
<td>There is not enough evidence to determine whether the intervention strategy is effective. This does not mean the intervention does not work. There is not enough research available or the results are too inconsistent to make a firm conclusion about the intervention strategy’s effectiveness. The CPSTF encourages those who use interventions with insufficient evidence to evaluate their efforts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended Against</td>
<td>There is strong or sufficient evidence that the intervention strategy is harmful or not effective.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EVALUATING THE EVIDENCE

- CPSTF findings are based on systematic reviews of all relevant, high-quality evidence. Systematic reviews are conducted in accordance with the highest international standards, using a transparent and replicable methodology that accounts for the complexities of real-world public health interventions.

- Systematic review science teams, coordinated by CDC scientists, evaluate the strengths and limitations of all relevant high-quality evidence to assess whether programs, services, and other interventions are effective in improving health at the population level.

- Review teams determine whether findings are applicable to different U.S. population groups and settings; highlights possible harms, potential benefits, and implementation considerations; and identifies evidence gaps and areas for future research.

- A separate team of economists conducts systematic economic analyses for recommended intervention approaches. They look at cost, cost effectiveness, and cost-benefit analyses to provide public health professionals with information they need to make decisions and allocate funding.

Visit the “Our Methodology” page on The Community Guide website at www.thecommunityguide.org/about/our-methodology for more information about the methods used to conduct the systematic reviews and the criteria the CPSTF uses to make findings and recommendations.