

Get Fit, Bit By Bit

Just a few minutes of exercise at a time may be just as good for you

Wiggle it, just a little bit.

Turns out, that works. When it comes to fitness, little bursts of activity add up.

That means you don't have to set aside an hour at the gym every day. Or even a half hour. You can get the benefits of exercise in micro-doses.

The federal physical activity guidelines recommend that we all get 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week. That means doing things like walking, water aerobics, ballroom dancing. Even gardening counts. For two-and-a-half hours. That's a long movie, or — for a lot of us — a way too regular nightly Netflix binge.

Minutes matter

Lots of times, conventional wisdom converts that to slipping on those sneakers or gardening gloves for 30 minutes at a shot, five times a week.

Not anymore.

“It turns out you probably don't really need all 30 minutes all at one sitting,” says Dr. Thomas Best, a family medicine-sports medicine specialist with UHealth's Sports Medicine Institute and team physician for the University of Miami Hurricanes and the Miami Marlins. “If you do it in three 10-minute sessions you will get almost the same amount of benefit, which is pretty striking.”

Even shorter sessions might work, too. A new study by the American Heart Association says five-minute bouts might be just as effective.

Get a move on

In short, says Dr. Best, every little bit makes a difference. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Park a little farther away from the store. Go for a short walk after, or before, dinner. (Holding hands with someone special might make it good for your soul, too.)

Strength training involving the major muscle groups is important too, Dr. Best says. Your body will thank you, especially when you're older.

And, he says, when it comes to the exercise guidelines, it doesn't have to be all or nothing.

"Some is better than none," he says. "So even if you can't achieve that 150 minutes a week, if you can get half of that you will still derive a significant health benefit both in terms of preventing disease as well as treating chronic disease — diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, etc."

Which kind of kills the excuse, "I don't have time."

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