

Physical Activity!

Bishop Strickland's invitation to the Southeastern Synod (SES) congregation members to join him in walking a mile a day during the forty days of Lent and pledging \$40 to World Hunger prompted me to write about the health benefits of physical activity. Anxiously awaiting the arrival of Easter, the Bishop's invitation provides us with a challenge to bundle up and get moving. We know that daily exercise will improve our overall health. This article sums up the benefits of regular physical activity for all age groups.

Until 2018, It had been ten years since the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published data on physical activity guidelines for Americans. In November of 2018 the CDC released new findings on physical activity stating that ***the scientific evidence continues to build—physical activity is linked with even more positive health outcomes than we previously thought.*** New findings show that moving more and sitting less have tremendous benefits for everyone, regardless of age, sex, race, ethnicity, or current fitness level. Individuals with a chronic disease or a disability benefit from regular physical activity, as do pregnant women. The previous guidelines (2008) stated that only 10-minute bouts of physical activity counted toward meeting the guidelines. This requirement has been removed because all activity counts. Now it is understood that a single bout of physical activity can produce immediate health benefits including, but not limited to, reduced anxiety and blood pressure, improved quality of sleep and improved insulin sensitivity.

School-aged youth (ages 6 through 17 years) can achieve substantial health benefits by doing moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity for periods of time that add up to 60 minutes or more each day. Risk factors for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and osteoporosis begin early in life. Data on children and youth have shown that those who are physically active have a better chance of remaining free of these health risks as adults. A variety of age-appropriate aerobic, muscle and bone strengthening activities are recommended for children and adolescents. Bone strengthening activities are of high priority due to the fact that the majority of an individual's peak bone mass is obtained by the end of adolescence.

Adults who are physically active are healthier and less likely to develop many chronic diseases than those who are inactive. A major point in the new guidelines is that adults should move more and sit less throughout the day. The equivalent of 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) per week of moderately intense aerobic activity provides substantial benefits for all adults. These benefits include lower risk of premature death, coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, anxiety, depression, Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Physically active adults also sleep better, have improved cognition, and have better quality of life. As a person's activity moves toward 300 minutes (5 hours) a week, the benefits include further reduction in risk for

several cancers and enhanced prevention of unhealthy weight gain. The benefits continue to increase when a person does more than the equivalent of 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity. Research has not identified an upper limit of total activity above which additional health benefits cease to occur. All aerobic activity should be spread throughout the week, reducing the risk of injury and avoiding excessive fatigue. In addition, adults should not ignore the need for muscle-strengthening activities as they provide increased bone strength and muscular fitness.

Aging: Regular physical activity is essential for healthy aging. Unfortunately, individuals aged 65 and older are the least physically active of any age group. Chronic health conditions may limit an older adult's ability to participate in intense aerobic physical activity but any amount of physical activity will help these individuals gain health benefits. The lack of activity for this age group can eventually mean the lack of flexibility and muscle strength to do everyday life tasks. Physical activity guidelines and benefits of exercise for this age group are the same as those above for all adults. Those who are not accustomed to exercising can start slowly and increase the intensity over a period of time

To learn more about the benefit of physical activity for all ages, look for the guidelines referenced in this article at www.health.gov. If you are not participating in regular, purposeful physical activity, check with your physician before starting an exercise program. Stand, move, walk, and exercise for good/better health in 2021! Enjoy and be well!

It is not too late to sign up to participate in the ELCA \$40, 40 days, 40 miles challenge. For information, see <https://www.elca-ses.org/newsdetail/40-40-40-lenten-hunger-walk-14959783>

It is not too late to get an influenza vaccination!

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Reference:

Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd Edition, 2018, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.health.gov.