

Focus on Fitness—Not Weight Loss—for a Longer, Healthier Life

If weight loss is starting to seem unachievable, try setting a different goal. Getting more physically fit can improve your health in many of the same ways. And you might find *gaining fitness* easier and more rewarding than *losing weight*.

It's no secret that being overweight and obese have been linked with a higher risk for some pretty serious health conditions. (Having a body mass index, or [BMI](#), between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight. Having a BMI of 30 and above is considered obese.) And research has long shown that losing weight can help reduce those risks.

But, even with the best of intentions, losing weight and keeping it off can be hard. Fortunately, it's not the only way to get healthier and live longer.

A recent study suggests that improving cardiorespiratory *fitness* might be more vital for a longer, healthier life than losing weight. Cardiorespiratory fitness is a measure of how well your body can supply oxygen-rich blood to your muscles. The more fit you are, the more efficient your lungs, heart, and blood vessels are at getting oxygen-rich blood to your muscles.

Here's why that might be more crucial than weight loss:

Focusing on fitness, rather than weight loss, might help you avoid weight cycling

Focusing too much on weight loss can backfire. You might work hard to lose weight but end up gaining it back. This cycle may repeat over and over in a pattern known as weight cycling or yo-yo dieting. It can start to feel futile to keep trying. And repeatedly gaining and losing significant amounts of weight may raise your risk of obesity and harm your health. Note that small changes in your weight from week to week are normal.

Getting in better physical shape might improve your overall health—even if you don't lose weight

Studies have found that being fit greatly lowers the risk of heart attack and stroke. This is true even for people who remain overweight or obese. In other words, getting in shape improves heart health even for people who don't lose weight in the process. That suggests that some of the health benefits of exercise don't depend on its ability to lower body weight.

Being fit might help you live longer, even if you're still overweight

[Studies have found](#) that being more physically fit can greatly lower the risk of death linked with being overweight or obese. It may even get rid of this risk fully—even if you're overweight or obese. In fact, the risk of death is greater for unfit people of normal weight than it is for fit people who are in the overweight range.

This is not to say that losing weight is pointless. While findings are mixed, there is still a lot of strong, reliable evidence that losing weight can reduce the risk of death. But, if you've had a hard time losing weight and/or keeping it off, you might feel frustrated and tempted to stop trying.

A shift in focus might be helpful. So, rather than giving up on healthy habits altogether, try making fitness your goal, rather than weight loss. The point is that there is no single path to health and fitness. If one path proves to be daunting, try another. You might find a longer, more healthful life along the way.

Steps to increase your cardiorespiratory fitness

Research suggests that you need moderate-to-high levels of cardiorespiratory fitness to enjoy these health benefits. And the best way to boost your cardiorespiratory fitness is with cardio or aerobic exercise. Here's what experts recommend.

Aim for 150 to 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity cardio, such as:

- Brisk walking
- Hiking on even terrain
- Jogging
- Water aerobics
- Doubles tennis

Or aim for 75 to 150 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity cardio, such as:

- Hiking on hilly terrain
- Jogging or running
- Swimming
- Biking
- Singles tennis

When you're doing a cardio workout, like walking briskly, you'll notice that you breathe more deeply and quickly. That helps your lungs take in more oxygen and deliver it to your bloodstream. You'll also notice your heart beating more quickly. That's a sign that your heart is pumping more quickly and strongly which helps push that oxygen-rich blood to your muscles.

The more often you do cardio workouts, the better your lungs, heart, and blood vessels get at doing this work. If you walk at a brisk clip for 2 miles, 3 days a week, for a whole month, you'll likely notice that it takes less effort at the end of the month compared to when you started. That's a sign that you have improved your cardiorespiratory fitness.

Ways to boost your overall fitness

It's also a good idea to do strength training and balance training, as well as cardio. That can help boost your overall fitness. All 3 types of training are crucial to a balanced fitness routine.

Experts recommend strength training twice a week. Strength training can help you build muscle and increase bone density. This can help you improve your balance and protect your joints. It can help you stay active, safely, as you get older. Also, muscle burns more calories than fat. So, boosting your muscle mass can help you lose or manage weight.

Strength training activities include:

- Using weight machines, free weights, or resistance bands
- Doing bodyweight exercises, like squats and pushups
- Practicing certain yoga or tai chi poses

And for older adults, balance training can help protect you from falls. You may want to weave these exercises into your strength training routine. Or do them periodically throughout the week. Good balance exercises include:

- Standing on one foot
- Walking heel to toe
- Using a balance board

Support your fitness with healthy lifestyle habits

Along with working out, there are other healthy lifestyle habits that can help support your fitness and your overall health. These include:

- Getting good, quality sleep
- Managing stress
- Eating whole foods, like fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein
- Limiting highly processed foods, like salty snacks, sugary treats, and fast food
- Not smoking (or quitting smoking)
- Drinking moderate amounts of alcohol (or not drinking alcohol)

Get started

If you haven't been active in a while, talk with your doctor before you get started. Your doctor can help design a fitness routine that works for you. Once you begin your fitness journey, try not to fixate on the scale. Instead, consider other markers of your progress:

- Do you feel better?
- Is your blood pressure improving?
- Are you sleeping better?
- Have you lowered your LDL cholesterol?

These are signs that your health is improving. And that kind of progress is far more important than hitting a certain number on a scale.

Are you ready to get active and fit? Check out the Active&Fit Direct™ program! You get a gym membership to any of the 11,600+ in our nationwide network, access to thousands of on-demand workout videos, and many more healthy living tips like this one - all for just \$25/month plus taxes! No other fees - [easily sign up online today!](#)

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