



ACSM Information On...

WHY WE EAT

Much time, effort and money is spent on thinking about, and determining, what and how much to eat. These questions are often asked when discussing weight loss or performance enhancement strategies. Equally important, if not more so, is understanding why we eat.

A Complete Physical Activity Program

A well-rounded physical activity program includes aerobic exercise and strength training exercise, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and overall health and function. Regular physical activity will provide more health benefits than sporadic, high intensity workouts, so choose exercises you are likely to enjoy and that you can incorporate into your schedule.

ACSM's physical activity recommendations for healthy adults, updated in 2007, recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) five days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation.

Examples of typical aerobic exercises are:

- Walking
- Running
- Stair climbing
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Cross country skiing
- Swimming.

In addition, strength training should be performed a minimum of two days each week, with 8-12 repetitions of 8-10 different exercises that target all major muscle groups. This type of training can be accomplished using body weight, resistance bands, free weights, medicine balls or weight machines.

Think for a moment on why you start eating. Have you ever started eating due to any of the following?

- Boredom
- Stress
- It was time to eat
- Other people were eating
- Food was placed in front of you
- You were already in the kitchen
- You were at a social gathering

And why do you stop eating?

- The food was gone
- Other people were watching you eat
- The television show you were watching was over
- The party ended

Rarely do we eat simply out of hunger. In fact, you will make over 200 decisions about food today, some conscious, many subconscious. They include:

- Should I eat breakfast and if so, what should I have?
- Should I eat the birthday cake that my co-worker brought in?
- Do I go with the vegetable side or fries?
- What should I make for dinner?

- Should I eat with the group or by myself at my desk?

Food environments

Whether you are aware or not, answers to the questions above aren't solely up to you. Your food environment (i.e., the food experience that surrounds you), plays an decisive role in your eating behavior. These are the factors that motivate us to eat, and to eat more. Your food environment is shaped by:

- Dining atmosphere
- Structure of food packaging
- Variety of food choices
- Visibility of food
- Proximity to food
- Size and color of plates and bowls
- Shape of glasses
- Size of utensils
- Person you are eating with

Small changes, big improvements

Your food environment surrounds you, and is with you, at all times. Many individuals know what they should eat and how much they should eat. However, research has shown that we rarely stick with diets or other dramatic changes to our food consumption. It's simply too hard to say no when in the moment of decision-making. Thus, making small improvements to your food environment has



the ability to take decision-making out of the process by guiding you to the healthier choice. Examples include:

- Warm up your dining room as cooler temperatures lead to more eating.
- Don't stockpile junk food. Have fewer items, and in smaller packages, in your cupboards. You will eat less of them.
- Don't buy multiple varieties of ice cream. You'll want to try them all.
- Place fruit on your counter at home and make it visible. You'll eat more of it.
- Place water on your dining room table during meals. You will drink more of it.
- Stand away from junk food. You will be much less likely to reach for it.
- Use small plates. Your consumption will go down.
- Buy red plates. Contrasting your plate color to food will raise awareness and you'll eat less.
- Use tall thin glasses for high calorie drinks. You will drink less of them.



- Go for the smaller spoons. You will scoop up, and thus eat, less.
- Limit the number of people you eat with. Your expectations of what is healthy to consume will change.
- Just eat. Don't read. Don't watch TV, text, or surf the web. You will eat less overall.

By creating positive food environments you are putting yourself in the best possible situation for success, whether it be weight loss or performance enhancement. Environment trumps nutrition guidelines. Put another way, the number of times you need to say no to junk food decreases and the number of times you say yes to healthy options increases when you are surrounded by healthier food environments. Positive food environments take the deciding out of the decision making and lead to healthy choices. These wise choices, when combined with exercise and an active lifestyle, will lead you to a healthier life.

Staying Active Pays Off!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that moderate physical activity—such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking—significantly contributes to longevity. Even a person with risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes or even a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can help you stay on a diet and lose weight. What's more – regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones.

The First Step

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, make sure to answer the following questions. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine if you're ready to begin an exercise routine or program.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition or that you should participate in physical activity only as recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest during physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance from dizziness? Do you ever lose consciousness?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or a heart condition?
- Do you know of any reason you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered yes to one or more questions, if you are over 40 years of age and have recently been inactive, or if you are concerned about your health, consult a physician before taking a fitness test or substantially increasing your physical activity. If you answered no to each question, then it's likely that you can safely begin exercising.

Prior to Exercise

Prior to beginning any exercise program, including the activities depicted in this brochure, individuals should seek medical evaluation and clearance to engage in activity. Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone, and some programs may result in injury. Activities should be carried out at a pace that is comfortable for the user. Users should discontinue participation in any exercise activity that causes pain or discomfort. In such event, medical consultation should be immediately obtained.



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