**BLOG**

**Exercise is not a four-letter word.**

It is not a secret – the United States is the most obese country in the world among developed nations and we are getting fatter by 4-5 percent each year according to [a recent study](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/22/obesity-rates-rising-developed-fattest-world_n_1294212.html#s716405&title=10_Finland) by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Currently, 65 percent of adults in the U.S. are overweight or obese and the rates for childhood obesity have been racing to catch up. With the wealth of healthy food options and the relatively easy access to fitness and nutrition programs, shouldn’t we be getting smaller?

The problem isn’t just in our diets; it is in our activity levels, or rather our inactivity levels. In today’s society, creating an [active lifestyle](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/Getting-Healthy_UCM_001078_SubHomePage.jsp) is becoming even more difficult thanks to a number of factors:

* People are less active due to technology and better mass transit.
* Sedentary jobs have increased 83% since 1950.
* Physically demanding jobs only account for approximately 25% of our total workforce – that’s 50% less than 1950!
* We work longer hours. The average American works 47 hours or more per week – 164 more hours per year than 20 years ago.

With busy work schedules, family obligations and packed weekends, it can be difficult to get the physical activity you need. But the [American Heart Association recommends](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/PhysicalActivity/GettingActive/American-Heart-Association-Guidelines_UCM_307976_Article.jsp) at least 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise or 75 minutes per week of vigorous exercise to start seeing changes in your health. That breaks down to 30 minutes per day just five days per week – a simple walk around the block after dinner, or first thing in the morning, will suffice! You can still see the benefits even if you divide your time into two or three segments of 10-15 minutes per day.

Making sure you meet the minimum physical activity levels is easier than you think. Try these tips for fitting fitness into your busy schedule:

1. **Do it in short bursts.** Being physically active for 10 minutes at a time throughout the day is just as effective as exercising for 30 minutes straight. Try taking a 10 minute walk down the hall two to three times per day at work. It’ll get you out of your cubicle for a bit and you’ll feel more energized and focused when you return.
2. **Mix it up.** Combine moderate and vigorous intensity physical activity. Try walking for 30 minutes three times per week and jogging two times per week. Instead of walking down the hall at work, try climbing a couple flights of stairs. Try intervals of jogging for one to two minutes followed by two to four minutes of walking. If jogging sounds too scary try the [Couch-To-5k](http://www.coolrunning.com/engine/2/2_3/181.shtml) running program, designed for people who have never run before, and find a training group near you.
3. **Set your schedule.** Walk during your lunch break or hit the pavement right after dinner. Go for a walk as soon as you wake up in the morning. The key is to set aside a specific time on specific days and make it part of your regular routine.
4. **The gym isn’t a necessity.** A pair of athletic shoes and a little motivation are all you need to live a more active, healthy life. Expensive gym memberships are not required. Walking or jogging through your neighborhood is just as effective. Want to build up some muscle tone? Try bicep curls with a gallon of milk or modified pushups against your kitchen counter. Do some jumping jacks while waiting for your morning cup of coffee. You may find that you don’t even need the caffeine after all.
5. **Make it a family affair.** Bring your spouse, children or a friend with you to add some fun and keep each other motivated. Your children are more likely to grow up to be physically active when they see mom and dad’s commitment to a lifetime of health.

Exercise doesn’t have to be a dirty word. By taking small steps to incorporate physical fitness into your routine, you are making huge strides towards living a longer, healthier life free of [heart disease](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Conditions_UCM_001087_SubHomePage.jsp), [stroke](http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/AboutStroke/About-Stroke_UCM_308529_SubHomePage.jsp), [diabetes](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Diabetes/AboutDiabetes/About-Diabetes_UCM_002032_Article.jsp) and [obesity](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/WeightManagement/Obesity/Obesity-Information_UCM_307908_Article.jsp). Be sure to talk with your healthcare provider first and find out if you have any restrictions or guidelines. But once you get moving, you probably won’t want to stop!

**What steps have you taken to incorporate more physical activity in your life?**