Coronary heart disease remains the No. 1 cause of death and disability in the United States for both men and women.

With prevention as our ultimate goal, communicating health information to the public will continue to be an important part of our activities. We’ve long provided the public with educational materials to help reduce three primary risk factors: high blood pressure, cigarette smoking (on average smokers die 14 years sooner than non-smokers) and high blood cholesterol. In recent years, the NHLBI and the AHA have addressed another major risk factor – sedentary lifestyle, or physical inactivity. The results of various studies now show that regular physical activity can help reduce the risk of heart disease. It also can help control other contributing risk factors, including obesity and diabetes. We hope that this information will help to stimulate a sensible exercise program as one way of keeping a healthy heart.

What are the benefits of regular physical activity?

These are the benefits often experienced by people who get regular physical activity.

**Feeling better**

Regular physical activity –

- Gives you more energy
- Helps in coping with stress
- Improves your self-image
- Increases resistances to fatigue
- Helps counter anxiety and depression
- Helps you to relax and feel less tense
- Improves the ability to fall asleep quickly and sleep well
- Provides an easy way to share and activity with friends or family and an opportunity to meet new friends

**Looking better**

Regular physical activity –
• Tones your muscles
• Burns off calories to help lose extra pounds or helps you stay at your desirable weight
• Helps control your appetite

Working better

Regular physical activity –

• Helps you to be more productive at work or school
• Increases your capacity for physical work or school
• Builds stamina for other physical activities
• Increases muscle strength
• Helps your heart and lungs work more efficiently

Feeling, looking and working better – all these benefits from regular physical activity can help you enjoy your life more fully

Five Common Myths About Exercise

Myth 1
Exercising makes you tired.

As they become more physically fit, most people feel physical activity gives them even more energy than before. Regular, moderate-to-brisk exercise can also help you reduce fatigue and manage stress.

Myth 2
Exercising takes too much time.

It only takes a few minutes a day to become more physically active. To condition your heart and lungs regular exercise does not have to take more than about 30 to 60 minutes, three to four times a week. If you don’t have 30 minutes in your schedule for an exercise break, try to find two 15-minute periods or even three 10-minute periods. Once you discover how much you enjoy these exercise breaks, you may want to make them a habit! Then physical activity becomes a natural part of your life.

Myth 3
All exercises give you the same benefits.

All physical activities can give you enjoyment. Low-intensity activities – if performed daily – also can have some long-term health benefits and lower your risk of heart disease. Regular, brisk
and sustained exercises such as brisk walking, jogging or swimming improves the efficiency of your heart and lungs and burns off substantial extra calories, as well as increases flexibility and muscle strength.

Myth 4
The older you are, the less exercise you need.

We tend to become less active with age, and therefore need to make sure we are getting enough physical activity, just as young people do. Age need not be a limitation. In fact, regular physical activity in older people increases their capacity to perform activities of daily living. What is important, no matter what your age, is tailoring the activity program to your own fitness level.

Myth 5
You have to be athletic to exercise.

Most physical activities do not require any special athletic skills. In fact, many people who found school sports difficult have discovered that these other activities are easy to do and enjoy. A perfect example is walking – an activity that requires no special talent, athletic ability or equipment.

Do we get enough exercise from our daily activities?

Most Americans get little vigorous exercise at work or during leisure hours. Today, only a few jobs require vigorous physical activity. People usually ride in cars or buses and watch TV during their free time rather than be physically active. Activities like golf and bowling provide people with some benefit. But they don’t provide the same benefits as regular, more vigorous exercise.

Evidence suggests that even low to moderate intensity activities can have both short and long term benefits. If done daily, they help lower your risk of heart disease. Such activities include pleasure walking, stair climbing, gardening, yard work, moderate to heavy housework, dancing and home exercise. More vigorous exercise can help improve fitness of the heart and lungs, which can provide even more consistent benefits for lowering heart disease risk.

Today, many people are rediscovering the benefits of regular, vigorous exercise—activities like swimming, brisk walking, running, or jumping rope. Aerobic exercises can condition your heart and lungs if performed at the proper intensity for at least 30 minutes, 3-4 times a week.

But you don’t have to train like a marathon runner to become more physically fit! Any activity that gets you moving around, even if it’s done just minutes each day, is better than not at all. For inactive people, the trick is to get started. One great way is to take a walk for 10-15 minutes during your lunch break. Other ideas offered here will help you get moving and living a more active life.
**How can I become more active throughout my day?**

To become more physically active throughout your day, take advantage of any opportunity to get up and move around. Here are some examples:

1. Use the stairs – up and down – instead of the elevator.
2. Park a few blocks from the office or store and walk the rest of the way. If you ride on public transportation, get off a stop or two before and walk a few blocks.
3. Take an activity break – get up and stretch, walk around and give your muscles and mind a chance to relax.
4. Instead of eating that extra snack, take a brisk stroll around the neighborhood.
5. Do housework, such as vacuuming, at a more brisk pace.
6. Mow your own lawn.
7. Carry your own groceries.
8. Go dancing instead of seeing a movie.
9. Take a walk after dinner instead of watching TV.
Exercise and your heart

1) What is the number one cause of death in the United States?
   • __________________________________________________

2-4) According to this article what are three primary major risk factors?
   • __________________________
   • __________________________
   • __________________________

5) Recently, what has the AHA (American Heart Association) identified as a risk factor?
   • __________________________

6-10) How can exercise make you feel better?
   • __________________________
   • __________________________
   • __________________________
   • __________________________
   • __________________________

11-13) How can exercise make you look better?
   • __________________________
   • __________________________
   • __________________________

14-17) How can exercise make you work better?
   • __________________________
   • __________________________
   • __________________________
18-22) What are five myths of exercise?
- _______________________
- _______________________
- _______________________
- _______________________
- _______________________

23-25) What are 3 benefits of regular brisk and sustained exercises?
- _______________________
- _______________________
- _______________________

26) More vigorous exercises can improve fitness of the heart and lungs, which can provide more consistent benefits for ______________________________________________________

27) Give an example of an exercise you could use to help reduce and manage stress?
- _______________________

28) Besides walking, what is an activity that you could do that requires no special talent or athletic skill?
- _______________________

29-30) Regular exercise does not have to take more than 30-60 minutes. What TV show or activity would you give up in order to exercise?
- 30 min - _______________________
- 60 min - _______________________