

Regular, Moderate Physical Activity Can Improve Health, Study Finds

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A study in the December 15 issue of the *American Journal of Cardiology* suggests that 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise six days a week can reduce the risk of metabolic syndrome, Reuters reports. Physicians diagnose metabolic syndrome based on the presence of at least three of five factors thought to increase the risk for heart disease, diabetes and stroke: a large waistline, high blood pressure, high blood triglyceride levels, unhealthy cholesterol levels and high blood sugar levels. Supported by the National Institutes of Health, researchers from Duke University Medical Center in North Carolina randomly assigned 171 overweight adults to join a six-month control group or one of three eight-month physical activity programs. The first intervention group walked roughly 19 kilometers (km) per week at a moderate intensity, while the second group jogged roughly 19 km per week and the third group jogged roughly 32 km per week. After eight months, 27 percent of study subjects met the criteria for metabolic syndrome—a marked decrease from 41 percent who met the criteria at the study's outset. Participants in the physical activity programs reduced their waist circumference while members of the control group gained an average of one pound and increased their waist circumference by half an inch. The results also suggest that less-intense exercise for longer periods of time may be more beneficial than short bursts of vigorous activity. The researchers conclude that their findings support current recommendations that call for adults to engage in 30 minutes of moderate activity daily, noting that such regimens can significantly improve health even in the absence of dietary changes. They add that the findings lend support to the theory that "some exercise is better than none, more exercise is generally better than less, and no exercise can be disastrous " ([Reuters/Yahoo! News](#), 12/17/07; Johnson et al., [American Journal of Cardiology](#), 12/15/07 [subscription required]).