

Taking stairs, raking leaves may equal a trip to the gym, study finds

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Cutting your own vegetables as opposed to buying pre-cut veggies at the store is just one everyday activity you can do as part of a healthy lifestyle, according to a new study by Oregon State University researcher Brad Cardinal. Washing and cutting your own vegetables burns 20 more calories than buying pre-cut. Credit: OSU College of Public Health and Human Sciences

New research at Oregon State University suggests the health benefits of small amounts of activity – even as small as one- and two-minute increments that add up to 30 minutes per day – can be just as beneficial as longer bouts of physical exercise achieved by a trip to the gym.

The nationally representative study of more than 6,000 American adults shows that an active lifestyle approach, as opposed to structured [exercise](#)

, may be just as beneficial in improving [health outcomes](#), including preventing [metabolic syndrome](#), [high blood pressure](#), and [high cholesterol](#).

"Our results suggest that engaging in an active lifestyle approach, compared to a structured exercise approach, may be just as beneficial in improving various health outcomes," said Paul Loprinzi, lead author of the study. "We encourage people to seek out opportunities to be active when the choice is available. For example, rather than sitting while talking on the phone, use this opportunity to get in some activity by pacing around while talking."

Perhaps just as importantly, the researchers found that 43 percent of those who participated in the "short bouts" of exercise met physical activity guidelines of 30 minutes day. In comparison, less than 10 percent of those in the longer exercise bouts met those federal guidelines for exercise.

Loprinzi, who is an assistant professor at Bellarmine University, conducted the research as a doctoral student working in the lab of Brad Cardinal at Oregon State University. Cardinal, a professor of exercise and sport science, is co-author of the study, which is in the current issue of the [American Journal of Health Promotion](#).

"You hear that less than 10 percent of Americans exercise and it gives the perception that people are lazy," Cardinal said. "Our research shows that more than 40 percent of adults achieved the exercise guidelines, by making movement a way of life."



This graphic shows daily activities, and how simply making movement part of every day can lead to a healthier lifestyle. Information provided by Brad Cardinal, professor of exercise science at Oregon State University, in conjunction with his new study. Values are kcal, or calories, and are for a 178 lb. person, which is the "average" weight of the participants in Cardinal's study. Credit: Graphic: Oliver Day

Cardinal, who has studied the "lifestyle exercise" model for more than 20 years, said one of the most common barriers people cite to getting enough exercise is lack of time. He said the results of this study are promising, and show that simply building movement into everyday activities can have meaningful health benefits.

"This is a more natural way to exercise, just to walk more and move

around a bit more," Cardinal said. "We are designed by nature as beings who are supposed to move. People get it in their minds, if I don't get that 30 minutes, I might as well not exercise at all. Our results really challenge that perception and give people meaningful, realistic options for meeting the physical activity guidelines."

For example, Cardinal said instead of driving half a mile, try biking or walking the same distance; instead of using a riding lawn mower, use a push lawn mower. Instead of sitting through TV commercials, try doing some sit-ups, push-ups, or jumping jacks during the commercial breaks; and instead of sitting and being a spectator at a child's sporting event, try walking around during the halftime break.

The researchers said the participants in this study wore accelerometers, which is an objective tool to measure physical activity. Those who participated in the short bouts of activity could be moving as few as one or two minutes at a time. The people in the "short bouts" group had positive results in areas such as blood pressure, cholesterol, metabolic syndrome, and waist circumference.

For instance, the study showed those in the shorter exercise group who met physical activity guidelines had an 89 percent chance of not having metabolic syndrome, compared to 87 percent for those meeting guidelines using the structured exercise approach.

Loprinzi said the one area where small bursts of activity did not seem to equal the benefits of longer, sustained exercise was in Body Mass Index, or BMI. However, the researchers cautioned that these findings do not necessarily mean that short bouts of activity do not help with weight loss, especially since they did find a benefit on weight circumference.

"There are inherent limitations in BMI as a surrogate measure of fat and health in general," Cardinal said. "People can still be 'fit' and 'fat.'"

The researchers emphasized that for [health benefits](#), people should seek out opportunities to be physically active.

"In our society, you will always be presented with things that entice you to sit or be less active because of technology, like using a leaf blower instead of a rake," Cardinal said. "Making [physical activity](#) a way of life is more cost-effective than an expensive gym membership. You may be more likely to stick with it, and over the long term, you'll be healthier, more mobile and just feel better all around."

Provided by Oregon State University

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