

Exercise can reduce medical costs

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Credit: American Heart Association

Getting [recommended levels of exercise](#) weekly may help keep down annual medical costs both for people with and without cardiovascular disease, according to new research in *Journal of the American Heart*

Association.

Although it's well known that regular moderate exercise reduces risk of heart disease, stroke, and [chronic conditions](#) such as diabetes and [high blood pressure](#), "our findings also emphasize the favorable impact on how much you pay for healthcare," said Khurram Nasir, M.D., M.P.H., senior author of the study and director of the Center for Healthcare Advancement & Outcomes and the High Risk Cardiovascular Disease Clinic at Baptist Health South Florida in Coral Gables.

The new study examined data from a 2012 national survey sample of more than 26,000 Americans age 18 or older, excluding people who were underweight, pregnant, or unable to walk up to 10 steps. Nearly half the participants who did not have cardiovascular disease, and almost one-third who did, reported meeting exercise guidelines for weekly moderate-to-vigorous activity.

People in the study who already had cardiovascular disease—specifically coronary artery disease, stroke, heart attack, arrhythmias or peripheral artery disease—had higher healthcare costs. But those patients who regularly exercised at recommended levels logged average healthcare costs more than \$2,500 lower than those who didn't meet exercise guidelines.



The American Heart Association Recommendations for Physical Activity in Adults

For Overall Cardiovascular Health:

At least **30** minutes of *moderate-intensity* aerobic activity **At least 5** days *per week* for a total of **150** minutes



OR

At least **25** minutes of *vigorous* aerobic activity **At least 3** days *per week* for a total of **75** minutes



or a *combination* of the two

AND

Moderate to **HIGH INTENSITY** muscle-strengthening activity **At least 2** days *per week* for additional health benefits




For Lowering Blood Pressure and Cholesterol:

An average of **40** minutes of *moderate- to vigorous-intensity* aerobic activity **3 or 4** days *per week*




Credit: American Heart Association

Participants were also grouped according to their number of cardiovascular risk factors—high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking and obesity. Among the healthiest participants, with no heart disease and at most one cardiovascular risk factor, those that exercised regularly had yearly medical costs averaging about \$500 lower than those who didn't exercise.

"Even among an established high-risk group such as those diagnosed with [heart disease](#) or stroke, those who engaged in regular exercise activities reported a much lower risk of being hospitalized, (having) an emergency room visit and use of prescription medications."

The research suggests that even if just 20 percent of patients with [cardiovascular disease](#) who are not getting enough physical activity would meet exercise goals, the nation could save several billion dollars in healthcare costs annually, researchers said.

"The message to the patient is clear: There is no better pill in reducing the risk of [disease](#) and healthcare costs than optimizing physical activity," Nasir said.

For cardiovascular health, the American Heart Association recommends at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity five days a week, or at least 25 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity three days a week, or a combination of the two. Moderate activity—which causes a light sweat, or only modest increases in breathing or [heart](#) rate—includes fast walking, lawn mowing, or heavy cleaning. Vigorous activity includes

running or race walking, lap swimming or aerobics. Heart patients should work with their healthcare team to achieve [exercise](#) goals.

Provided by American Heart Association

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