

# Here's how you can 'feel better, think better, and sleep better'

November 22 2018, by Sophia Fox-Sowell

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Studies show that sitting too much can raise your risk of cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.

But getting up to walk around your block, dance to your favorite song, or

do chores around your house could vastly improve your health and increase your [brain function](#).

That's the message of the new physical fitness guidelines issued by the federal government last week.

"A single bout of [exercise](#) has an immediate effect on brain health," said Charles Hillman, a cognitive neuroscientist at Northeastern who helped to create the new guidelines by analyzing 10 years of scientific literature on [physical activity](#) and brain health. "Every time you're active, you feel better, think better, and sleep better."

The new guidelines recommend that adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week. You can meet the quota by gardening, mowing your lawn, or walking your dog. Or by lifting weights, shoveling snow, or doing yoga.

Hillman's literature review found that only 20 percent of Americans meet the new guidelines, which updated the recommendations issued in 2008. "We're victims of our own ingenuity, we've basically engineered physical activity out of our lives," said Hillman, who co-directs the Center for Cognitive and Brain Health at Northeastern. "We have cars instead of using our feet, we take escalators and elevators instead of climbing stairs, which has led to a more sedentary lifestyle."

Here are a few key points from the guidelines:

- Adults should get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of exercise every week, including at least two sessions of muscle-strengthening activities such as squats, push-ups, and dips.
- A two minute walk in the morning, a trip up and down the stairs at lunchtime, walking home instead of taking a cab at night—it all adds up. You don't need to complete exercises in 10 minute

intervals, as the 2008 guidelines recommended. The goal is to accumulate as much exercise as possible throughout the course of the day.

- Regular exercise reduces the risk of high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers, including bladder, breast, and colon cancer.
- There are many ways to get your heart rate up, such as washing your car, building a snowman, or getting off the subway one stop early and walking the rest of the way. Pick an activity that fits into your schedule and get moving.
- Children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 are advised to exercise for 60 minutes per day. Their routine should include aerobic activities such as walking, muscle-strengthening exercises such as pull-ups, and bone-strengthening activities such as jumping rope. "A physically active lifestyle leads to a healthier [brain](#) during youth," said Hillman, whose research shows that kids who run around for at least 70 minutes per day exhibit improved thinking skills compared to those who aren't as active.

Provided by Northeastern University

Citation: Here's how you can 'feel better, think better, and sleep better' (2018, November 22) retrieved 4 June 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-11-here-how-you-can-feel.html>

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