



Patients on the Move!

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ABSTRACT

Recently, the Surgeon General put out a Call to Action “To Promote Walking and Walkable Communities.” Walking is a powerful health promotion activity that nurse practitioners (NPs) can quickly prescribe as part of a management plan for the vast majority of their patients. NPs are key health care professionals in the promotion of walking and other physical activity for their patients across the life span. NPs should be familiar with physical activity recommendations for all of their patients, including patients with disabilities. NPs need to be able to assess physical activity as well as prescribe individualized physical activity plans.

Keywords: exercise, health promotion, nurse practitioners, physical activity, walking

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Walking is a powerful health promotion activity that nurse practitioners (NPs) can quickly prescribe as part of a management plan for the vast majority of their patients. Recently, the Surgeon General put out a Call to Action “To Promote Walking and Walkable Communities.”¹ In this Call to Action, the Surgeon General encouraged health care professionals to provide physical activity counseling. He specifically encouraged health care professionals to promote walking because of the ability of most patients to be able to walk and the ability to modify physical activity walking plans based on specific patient abilities.¹

NPs can be key health care professionals in the promotion of physical activity with patients across the

life span. The promotion of physical activity is an important part of the full-spectrum approach that NPs take when providing health care, including primary prevention.^{2,3} In fact, if NPs are not already doing so, they should be encouraging patients during relevant patient encounters to increase their physical activity. This article provides evidence and information about physical activity that NPs can refer to for their physical activity assessment and prescription practices.

AEROBIC PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADULTS

Obtaining the recommended amount of aerobic physical activity has the potential to promote health and prevent certain diseases in a way that is more

This CE learning activity is designed to augment the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of nurse practitioners and assist in their understanding of how increasing physical activity maintains and increases health.

At the conclusion of this activity, the participant will be able to:

- Review physical activity (PA) recommendations across the life span
- Identify tools that NPs can use to assess and prescribe PA for their patients
- Illustrate how NPs can promote PA for individuals with disabilities

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The authors do not present any off-label or non-FDA-approved recommendations for treatment.

This activity has been awarded 1.0 Contact Hours of which 0 credit are in the area of Pharmacology. The activity is valid for CE credit until February 1, 2019.

powerful than any pharmaceutical class of drugs has the ability to do. The weekly recommended amounts of aerobic physical activity for adults is ≥ 150 minutes of moderate physical activity, ≥ 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity, or an equivalent combination of these types of aerobic physical activity.⁴ One of the easiest ways to obtain aerobic physical activity can be accomplished by brisk walking.⁴

It is important for NPs to encourage all of their patients who are not meeting physical activity guidelines to be more physically active. Health benefits accrued from physical activity are directly related to the level of physical activity in which an individual engages. These levels include inactive, low level, medium level, and high level (Table 1).⁴

One way that adults can obtain enough steps with brisk walking is to add 3,000 steps per day at a moderate walking pace to the patient's existing activity. This increase of 3,000 steps approximates 30 minutes of physical activity.⁵ Based on previously published step count data, counts per day have been classified in levels ranging from less than 5,000, which is sedentary, up to 10,000 or more steps per day, which is considered active (Table 2).⁶ Adults in the United States have an average of slightly over 5,000 steps per day, which places them into the low active category.⁷

Although substantial health benefits are gained from engaging in the recommended amount of

physical activity, not all patients are able to obtain that level of physical activity. However, there is emerging evidence that engaging in lower levels of physical activity is better than no activity.⁸ Interestingly, the greatest gain in health is made at the low end of the activity scale.^{9,10} Therefore, it is useful for NPs to provide physical activity counseling for all patients and encourage even small increases of regular physical activity.

BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ACROSS THE LIFE SPAN

Obtaining the recommended amount of physical activity has multiple benefits. In fact, physical activity has been called *the perfect preventive medicine*.¹¹ Physical activity is directly linked to decreasing many noncommunicable diseases. Noncommunicable diseases are now the leading cause of death globally.¹²

Engaging in regular physical activity is important across the life span. Children and adolescents experience an improvement in cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, bone health, and body composition.⁴ Equally important, they have healthier cardiovascular and metabolic health markers. Adults also experience multiple benefits from engaging in regular physical activity. At the top of this list is decreased risk of an early death.⁴ Adequate physical activity is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular diseases, including heart disease, stroke, hypertension, and hypercholesterolemia.⁴ Physical

Table 1. Physical Activity Minutes and Relationship to Health Benefits⁴

| Level of Physical Activity | Recommended Amount of Moderate-intensity Minutes per Week of Physical Activity | Health Benefits |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inactive level | Obtaining no additional physical activity throughout the day beyond baseline activity | Unhealthy |
| Low level | Obtaining some physical activity beyond baseline but not obtaining 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity physical activity | Partial health benefits |
| Medium level | Obtaining the recommended amount of physical activity on a scale of 150 minutes to 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity physical activity | Substantial health benefits |
| High level | Obtaining more than 300 minutes a week of moderate intensity physical activity | There are additional health benefits; however, the evidence is not yet available to know at which end of the upper limit of physical activity an individual would not accrue any additional health benefits |

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