

Getting Started With Weight Control: Increased Activity

Target Audience: Adults and adults with diabetes

Objectives: Participants will:

1. Understand that moderate weight loss can help prevent and control chronic disease.
2. Begin exercising at least 3 days and preferably 5 to 7 days a week.

Time Required: 30 minutes; for 15-minute presentation, eliminate activity at end

Equipment: Overhead projector and overhead

Handouts: “My Exercise Achievement Record”; “Exercise Contract”; “Getting More Active for People Without Chronic Disease”; “Getting More Active for People With Diabetes”; “Getting More Active for People Without Chronic Disease”

Lesson Plan

Many people in this country are overweight or at least feel they could lose a few pounds. (*Show overhead entitled “Benefits of Weight Control and Exercise.”*) When people lose weight they gain better control of many serious health problems, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and triglycerides, and even arthritis. (*If you have diabetes, you should know that insulin works best in leaner people who have more muscle mass. Fat cells do not use insulin well. Losing weight, if you are overweight, or just developing more muscle by exercising may help your insulin work better.*)

Many people who are overweight are often told that they need to achieve so-called “ideal” body weight. This weight might be 50 to 100 pounds less than what they currently weigh. Unfortunately, few people ever achieve this weight, so they become discouraged. (*Show overhead entitled “Benefits of Moderate Weight Loss.”*) New research has shown, however, that a weight loss of just 10 to 20 pounds can lower blood pressure, blood glucose, and lipid levels significantly. It is much better for a person to lose a smaller amount of weight and keep it off than to lose a large amount of weight and gain it all back.

How can you lose weight? Most people first think about eating less food. But the body doesn’t like this much. In fact, we have been genetically programmed to preserve our body fat. Many people in the world experience famine every few years. Our ancestors, who survived famines and passed their genes down to us, stored fat well and kept their blood glucose (sugar) levels up with less food during a lot of activity. (*Show overhead entitled “You Are Genetically Superior.”*) In fact, while you may not think so, you are genetically superior. Because you store fat more efficiently, you are more likely to survive hard times like war, drought, and famine. These genes don’t go away just because we live where we have plenty of food and few natural or man-made disasters.

But let's face it, chronic diseases are the new enemies we must conquer. There are things you can do to master them. Weight control is one of them. The goal here, though, is not an "ideal" body weight but a "healthy" body weight. (*Show overhead entitled "A Healthy Body Weight."*) What is a healthy body weight? A healthy body weight is the STABLE weight you achieve when you eat adequate amounts of nutritious food and do 30 or more minutes of physical activity on most days—preferably all days of the week.

You notice I said **stable weight**. (*Show overhead entitled "Repeated Weight Loss and Gain."*) Gaining and losing weight over and over again does not help you either physically or mentally. When you lose weight, especially if you do not exercise, you lose fat and muscle. Exercise during weight loss preserves more muscle. Unfortunately, when you regain weight, much of the regained weight is fat not muscle, so you may end up with more fat than you had before you started.

(*Show overhead entitled "Muscle Weighs More Than Fat."*) Many people, when they begin exercising, don't lose much weight on the scales, but they find their clothes fit better because they have toned up. Muscle weighs more than fat so the scale is a poor judge of changes in body mass.

(*Show overhead entitled "Talk With Your Doctor."*) To get started on a healthy weight control program, talk to your doctor about starting an exercise program. Your doctor can tell you whether exercise is safe for you. Then look for someone to help develop an exercise program for you. Some fitness centers or wellness programs (*or diabetes education programs*) have exercise experts who can develop a safe exercise program for you.

If such help is not available, and your doctor says it is fine for you to exercise, you may want to start walking. Walking is a low-impact exercise that requires no special equipment except good shoes that fit well and give good support. (*Show overhead entitled "How to Have a Successful Walking Program."*)

The first week, walk a short distance that is easy for you. This may be once around your house or up and down your driveway a few times. Then add another lap the next week or see whether you can walk around the block. Try to exercise when the weather is not too cold or too hot. If necessary, walk inside a mall or gymnasium.

To prevent boredom, walk with a friend or a dog. If a companion is unavailable, and you are walking in a safe environment, get a "walkman" and listen to music or books-on-tape. You can borrow books-on-tape from many libraries and bookstores.

(*Show overhead entitled "Exercise So You Feel Exhilarated, Not Exhausted."*) Do enough exercise to feel exhilarated but not exhausted. Don't compete with anyone but yourself. If time is a problem, break your exercise into short 5–10 minute exercise breaks. Gradually work up to 30 minutes or more.

You will see your progress more clearly if you keep track of how far and how long you walked. Use the handout, *My Exercise Achievement Record*, to record your progress. Make multiple copies so you can keep track each week and compare your progress over time.

If walking is not your thing, there are other options. An excellent one for people with arthritis is water exercises offered by some Y's. Just moving around in the pool is very

good exercise. Swimming laps or doing water aerobics is also excellent. Other good choices are mowing the lawn, gardening, cycling, walking a golf course, canoeing, and dancing. The point is to do something for at least 30–45 minutes nearly every day. Do something different every day if you can. Variety makes exercise more fun and less boring.

Even if you cannot get around well, there are special fitness programs available on video tape. A really good series is called “Armchair Fitness.” It can be ordered at a local video store. Exercise will give you more energy and decrease joint and muscle pain if you start out gradually and build up slowly.

(Show overhead entitled “If There Is Pain, There Is No Gain.”) Never exercise if it causes pain. Pain is a sign you are doing too much. You should be making an “effort” and your muscles and joints may feel a little tight and sore at first, but you should feel better after your exercise, not worse. That means you should feel looser, warmer, and more energetic.

So make a promise to yourself to get active. It is the first step to better blood glucose levels, lower blood lipids, improved weight control, and higher self-esteem and confidence.

Activity

The following are suggested activities to help employees reach their physical fitness goals:

1. Have a participant read and fill out the “Getting More Active” handout (Give them either the one for people with or without diabetes).
2. Develop walking teams or partners for exercise. Give out maps of different routes around the community with distances posted. Have teams list their mileage walked together. You may also wish to map the walking distances of the group on a State or U.S. map to take an imaginary walk from your location to a scenic vacation spot. Investigate whether a local fitness club will give membership discounts or develop special exercise programs for people in the class.
3. Recruit walking teams to walk to raise money for a special cause like the American Diabetes Association Walktoberfest held each October. Call 1-800-DIABETES to get information on walk locations, times, and pledge sheets to raise money for diabetes research.

(Distribute “Getting More Active” and “Exercise Contract.” Have participants read and complete handouts. Arrange to meet with participants to discuss their progress in increasing their exercise.)