What does “regular” exercise mean?

To answer this question, refer to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, which are based on the latest science. They include specific recommendations for different ages and stages of the lifespan. Key messages and guidelines for adults are to move more and sit less throughout the day and to “move your way.” For greatest health benefits, adults should do at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate intensity activity or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity per week. (Or, use a combination of moderate and vigorous.)

Moderate intensity is working at a level where you can barely carry on a conversation, but not sing. Vigorous is when you are able to say a few words, but not a sentence. Adults should also do muscle strengthening activities that involve all muscle groups on two or more days per week.

You can realize both immediate and long-term benefits from physical activity. Some immediate benefits include better mood, improved memory, better ability to concentrate, and better decision making. You may feel less anxiety, your blood pressure may be lower, you may have better insulin sensitivity, and exercise can help you sleep better.

Regular physical activity can postpone and prevent many chronic conditions. It can also treat and even reverse some chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Other long-term benefits include a lower risk of depression and anxiety, lower risk of dementia and cognitive impairment, and it aids in maintaining a healthy weight. Exercise can lower the risk of developing some cancers, especially breast, prostate, and colon cancer.

So, why don’t people get enough physical activity? Some of the common barriers include lack of motivation, not enough time, and lack of access to exercise facilities and equipment. Some people just don’t like to exercise or be active, they are too tired, or they are not sure what type of activity is good or how to do specific exercises.

Lack of motivation is one of the leading barriers to physical activity. Although many people understand the significant benefit of moving more and sitting less, some individuals just haven’t quite found their “why” or they have a negative view of physical activity. The right “why” is the motivator that makes you genuinely want to prioritize physical activity. This comes from within, it’s internal.

Think about the types of activities you truly enjoy. If you dread a certain type of exercise, stop doing it! Focus on activities you enjoy and actually look forward to doing instead. Pay attention to the immediate benefits that correspond with any changes in movement you’ve made.