How much should I exercise?

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That question, like many of the questions on this blog, can be answered with two simple, yet confoundingly vague words.

It depends.

Each person will need a different amount of exercise, depending on their personal tastes and goals. The amount will also depend on different factors like age, gender, weight, and current fitness level. There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to exercise, so don't compare yourself with Fitness Bob in your office, who seems to run a half-marathon every other week.

"But how much should I exercise if I want to be *healthy*?" you might insist.

Well, again, it depends; while exercise is an important component of health, it's not the main or even central component. You still need to eat a balanced diet, get plenty of sleep, and keep yourself hydrated.

However, if you absolutely require specific numbers, the American Heart Association and the Department of Health and Human Services provide a few. Just keep in mind the immortal words of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, these are more like guidelines than actual rules.

If you're already a moderately healthy adult, aim for 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, 75 minutes of intense aerobic activity per week, or a combination of the two. Spread this activity out over the course of the week. In other words, it's generally better to take five 30-minute walking sessions than cram in one 75-minute workout.

Now, let's break down what we mean by "moderate" aerobic activity and "intense." Moderate aerobic activity is things like brisk walking, doing yoga, biking at a leisurely pace, or climbing stairs. However, you don't have to throw on a pair of gym shorts and "do exercise," per se to get the health benefits. Just get moving. Moderate physical activity can also include mowing the lawn, vigorous house cleaning, walking the dog, jumping on a trampoline, and even tossing a frisbee with your friend.

Intense aerobic activity bumps up your heart rate. These are things like running, swimming, and dancing, the activities we normally associate with traditional workouts.

It's important to note that these numbers are meant to promote a healthy lifestyle. In other words, don't think of it as running for 45-minutes, then crashing on the couch the rest of the day. Even if you hit the benchmark numbers, it's important to stay moving throughout the day. Take the stairs, instead of the elevator. Walk, as you talk on the phone. Park way out in the boonies of the parking lot, to force yourself to hike the half-mile into HEB.

Now, if you're someone who saw 150 minutes and flung yourself on the floor, do not despair. The important point to remember about all of this is, *just get moving*. If you only have fifteen minutes to spare, go for a walk around your office building or neighborhood. Even if you only have five minutes, do some jumping jacks. It all adds up.

Let me repeat: it all adds up.

Five minutes of jumping jacks is still more than doing nothing. So maybe you're not at the level of jogging for thirty minutes straight yet. That's OK. Even if you go walking for ten minutes, three times per week, that is still thirty minutes. You can build up to the 150-minute marker. The point is to start incorporating more movement into your daily life. We often go

from sitting at the breakfast table to sitting in our car to sitting at our office desk, back to sitting on the couch at home. And all that sitting is eating away important muscle groups in the body.

Finally, the AMA and DHHS recommend that the average adult spend at least two days doing strength training exercises, for each of the major muscle groups. As a refresher, those are

1. Quadriceps
2. Hamstrings
3. Calves
4. Chest
5. Back
6. Shoulders
7. Triceps
8. Biceps
9. Forearms
10. Trapezius
11. Abs

So, to strength train, chose a weight that will tire your muscles after 12-15 repetitions and hit all the major muscle groups.

Strength training is important, because it increases lean muscle mass, builds bone strength, and helps you burn energy more efficiently, even when you're not actively working out. To build strength in order to do cardio, you need to…well…strength train. And to be able to build resistance and endurance to strength train, you need to incorporate aerobic exercise in your routine. Aerobic exercise and strength training are essentially two sides of the same coin, and both are crucial for having a healthy lifestyle.

So, to recap:

1. Something is better than nothing.
2. Move more than you sit.
3. Have a combination of aerobic and strength training days

And that's it. Your exercise needs will change and depend on your goals, such as whether you want to lose weight, build muscle, or simply get more active. However, if anything is impressed upon you after reading this blog post, let it be this: spread out physical activity over the course of the week. Find small ways to get moving. And have fun with it! Exercise does not have to be all sweat and grunting. Even if you want to have a water-balloon fight, hoola-hoop, or play laser tag, go for it!

Just get moving.