

Moderate-intensity activity requires a medium level of effort. On a scale of 0 to 10, where sitting is 0 and the greatest effort possible is 10, moderate-intensity activity is a 5 or 6 and produces noticeable increases in breathing rate and heart rate.

Vigorous-intensity activity begins at a level of 7 or 8 on this scale and produces large increases in a person's breathing and heart rate.

A general rule of thumb is that 2 minutes of moderate-intensity activity counts the same as 1 minute of vigorous-intensity activity. For example, 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity is roughly the same as 15 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity.

Muscle-Strengthening Activities

At least 2 days a week, older adults should do muscle-strengthening activities that involve all the major muscle groups. These are the muscles of the legs, hips, chest, back, abdomen, shoulders, and arms. The improvements in, or maintenance of, muscular strength are specific to the muscles used during the activity, so a variety of activities is necessary to achieve balanced muscle strength.

Muscle-strengthening activities make muscles do more work than they are accustomed to during activities of daily life. Examples of muscle-strengthening activities include lifting weights, working with resistance bands, doing calisthenics that use body weight for resistance (such as push-ups, pull-ups, and planks), climbing stairs, shoveling snow, and carrying heavy loads (such as groceries and heavy gardening).

Muscle-strengthening activities count if they involve a moderate or greater level of intensity or effort and work the major muscle groups of the body. Whatever the reason for doing it, any muscle-strengthening activity counts toward meeting the key guidelines. For example, muscle-strengthening activity done as part of a therapy or rehabilitation program can count.

No specific amount of time is recommended for muscle strengthening, but muscle-strengthening exercises should be performed to the point at which it would be difficult to do another repetition. When resistance training is used to enhance muscle strength, one set of 8 to 12 repetitions of each exercise is effective, although 2 or 3 sets may be more effective. Development of muscle strength and endurance is progressive over time. That means that gradual increases in the amount of weight, number of sets or repetitions, or the number of days a week of exercise will result in stronger muscles.

