



WALK KANSAS

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Research and Extension

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2025 Week Eight



Intense Exercise: Your body loves it, even if you don't

Pushing yourself a little harder when you exercise may be a good thing. Studies show that even a few minutes of vigorous physical activity each day can reduce the risk of the most aggressive types of cancer, boost your brain power, curb hunger, and promote longevity.

What exactly is intense or vigorous activity, and what happens when you crank up the intensity? An easy way to determine if you are working at a vigorous level is to take the talk test. If you struggle to string a few words together while doing an activity, that is vigorous. When you boost the intensity of your activity — even for a couple of minutes — your body adapts: it burns more fuel (calories), muscles build and repair themselves faster, blood vessels remodel themselves and become more resilient, and your heart increases its stroke volume (pumping more blood with each beat). The same thing happens when you add more weight and more repetitions to strengthening exercises. This sends a signal to your body that it needs to get stronger to keep up with these demands.

Understanding how vigorous intensity activity impacts your body can be compared to fuel efficiency when driving. When you have plenty of time to reach your destination, you can drive at a steady speed and use a minimal amount of fuel. If you are running late and need to make up time, your trip is likely a series of abrupt starts and stops. Each time you mash down on the gas pedal, you are burning more fuel than you would typically need to get from place to place. In the case of health and fitness, this is a good thing.

During week 3, you learned about intervals, and this is very similar. If you have been adding intervals (short bursts of vigorous activity) to your walk, increase the length of those to 1 or 2 minutes, working hard enough so you can only say a few words. Studies show that as little as 4 to 5 minutes/day of intermittent vigorous activity can make a huge impact in reducing your risk for developing a chronic illness. So, challenge yourself a little more this week!

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Stretch and Strengthen Your Hip Flexor

Hip flexors are a group of muscles that allow you to lift your knees toward your chest and to bend forward from the hips. Tight hip flexors are a common problem for people who spend a lot of time sitting. As a result of these muscles being tight, you could also have low back pain, hip pain, and injury. Simple hip strengthening and stretching exercises can keep these muscles from getting tight and can reduce your risk of injury and pain.

Hip Flexor Stretches

Seated Butterfly Stretch

This is a good stretch for your inner thighs, hips, and lower back. When doing this stretch, make sure you lean forward from your hips rather than rounding out your lower back.

1. Sit on the floor with your back straight, soles of your feet pressed together, and your knees dropped to the sides as far as they will comfortably go.
2. Tighten your abdominal muscles. Grasp your feet and ankles and slowly lean forward, keeping your spine straight. Hold this pose for 10 to 30 seconds.

To reduce stress on your knees, move your feet away from your body. To increase the stretch, move your feet toward your body.

Standing (Quadriceps) Stretch

1. Stand with your feet hip-width apart and toes forward.
2. Bend your right knee, and bring your right heel up toward your butt.
3. Hold your right foot with the right hand, and gently pull to point your knee toward the floor. You can hold on to a counter or chair with your left hand for balance.
4. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on your other leg.

To keep your hips functional and free of pain, stay active and include exercises that involve the hips and do stretches regularly. Here is a demonstration of lower body stretches: arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/physical-activity/success-strategies/lower-body-stretches

Breath Fresh, Train Smart, Stay Safe!



Being a bicyclist and being a pedestrian go hand in hand because they're both considered great alternatives to driving. Both involve safety measures, like being visible and being aware of traffic around you. Bike on the street, rather than a sidewalk, and be aware that you are subject to the same rules of the road as cars — stop at intersections and use arm turn signals. Kansas law requires you give at least 3 feet of space when passing. When biking, always wear a helmet. Helmets have been shown to decrease rates of skull fractures and help prevent serious and fatal injuries. So, embrace helmet hair because helmets vital to bike safety! There's a lot more to know about smart cycling. If you need more resources you can visit: ktsro.org/bicycle-safety.

Courtney Nowland,

Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office

Walk Kansas Webinars

Did you miss a webinar this year? Below are links to the 2025 series.

Your Heart and Diabetes: A Close Connection:

https://youtu.be/_AwNwFvg0t0

Walking Toward a Stronger Future:

<https://youtu.be/ECvviJO2gGw>

Happy Feet: <https://youtu.be/p3vO93hiBlc>

Blue Zones: Keys to Living Longer and Better:

<https://youtu.be/7St3thID02c>

Healthy Fats

Your body needs fat. It is important to include fats in your diet because they provide energy and support cell growth. Healthful fats also help protect your organs, help keep your body warm, produce important hormones, and help your body absorb some nutrients.

Some types of fats are healthful, others are harmful. All fats have the same number of calories, but they have different chemical structures and physical properties. Harmful fats, which include saturated and trans fats, will be more solid at room temperature. Healthful (unsaturated) fats, like canola and olive oil, are liquid. Fats also have different effects on the blood cholesterol level in your body. Solid (saturated and trans) fats raise bad cholesterol (LDL) levels in your blood. Unsaturated fats can lower bad cholesterol levels and should be included as part of a healthy eating style.

Here is a helpful visual on choosing healthful fats: medinsteadofmeds.com/tips-and-tools/swap-your-fats/

Avocados contain more fat (the good kind) than carbohydrate. They are a good source of fiber as well, which helps you feel full and satisfied. Avocados also promote gut and brain health.



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Chicken Avocado Salad

Makes 2 Meal-sized Servings

Ingredients:

Chicken:

- 2 chicken breasts (approximately 8 ounces total)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Dressing:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 1 teaspoon honey
- ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Salad:

- 1 medium avocado, diced
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro, chopped
- 2 cups mixed greens

Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. In a small bowl, mix olive oil, lemon juice, garlic powder, paprika, salt and pepper; brush on chicken. Grill or pan-cook chicken to an internal temperature of 165°F. Let chicken rest for 5 minutes, then slice.
3. Prepare the salad by first rinsing produce under cold running water. Remove moisture in greens by using a salad spinner or lay greens on a clean kitchen towel or paper towels and pat them dry. Combine avocado, tomatoes, cilantro, and greens in a bowl.
4. Prepare the dressing: Whisk together olive oil, lime juice, honey, Dijon mustard, salt, and pepper.
5. Add the sliced chicken to the salad and drizzle with dressing. Toss gently and enjoy.

Nutrition Information per serving (1/2 of recipe as a meal):

421 calories; 35 g total fat (9 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat); 18 g carbohydrates; 5.5 g total sugars; 16.5 g protein; 9.5 g fiber; 347 mg sodium.