DOI: 10.1002/nur.22125

EDITORIAL

RESEARCH IN NURSING & HEALTH WILEY

Staying active during the pandemic

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic forced many of us to work remotely from home resulting in more sitting behavior than usual. Even with changes in our work and home environment, I believe that nurses, including nurse researchers and faculty, can and should be role models for a healthy lifestyle. Nurses are in a prime position to advocate for the health benefits of physical activity. The public views nurses as trustworthy and looks to nurses to show the pathways leading toward healthy living. Nurses as a group, however, do not get enough physical activity (Hajo et al., 2020). In my own research, tracking and monitoring activity can be an important way help individuals to get up and move (O'Brien & Meyer, 2020). Keeping in mind what we have learned through research about physical activity can help us address the challenge of finding or keeping an active lifestyle.

According to the American Cancer Society, individuals who sit more than 6 h a day, have an increased risk for premature death (women 37% and men 16%) (Patel et al., 2018). The importance of physical activity is well-established in the literature for decreasing chronic disease (Golightly et al., 2017), improving mental health (Paluska & Schwenk, 2000), delaying the onset of dementia (Cui et al., 2018), and improving the overall quality of life (National Institute on Aging, 2021). And we know what to do—create a mindset to achieve the recommended weekly 150 min (5 days a week × 30 min) of moderate-intensity physical activity to prevent the onset of chronic disease and death (Bushman, 2019). Creating a mindset that supports daily physical activity requires adjusting our behaviors for self-care. This adjustment can be achieved throughout the day by setting a personal goal to move more and sit less. Remember, even small increases in physical activity is better than no physical activity.

Achieving more movement throughout the day can be obtained by four types of physical activity: endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility (Lam et al., 2018). Each type of activity is important for us to incorporate into our daily routines to build strength and stability. Endurance includes activities such as brisk walking or jogging, yard work, dancing, swimming, biking, and climbing stairs or hills (National Institute on Aging, 2021). Strength involves exercise that uses muscles to increase strength and build skeletal muscles (Fiatarone Singh et al., 2019). Strength training can be achieved by using 1–2 pound weights or no weights at all through the use of a resistance band. Balance is the ability to control your body position either stationary or while moving. Performing balance exercises every day makes it easier to move our body. Try standing on one foot, then the other. If at first, you need support, hold on to something sturdy. Flexibility consists of stretching our muscles. Flexibility can be achieved simply by stretching your legs out in front of you or with your heels on the floor, bend your ankles to point toes toward the ceiling, then bend your ankles to point toes away from the ceiling, in each position hold for 10–30 s (National Institute on Aging, 2021).

Now you have some ideas about how to perform the four types of physical activity that is important for your body to maintain health. The majority of us are now trying to figure out a home workout routine since many of the gyms are closed due to the pandemic. A few ideas, include accessing a workout through on-line classes. Many sites now offer free workouts for yoga, Pilates, and aerobic exercises. Other options to consider, are putting on your favorite music and dancing in your home by yourself or with a family member or taking a walk outside. In addition, when you are watching television, practice stretching during commercial breaks. Walk around your home when you are talking on the phone. Finally, when you are running errands or going to doctor's appointments, park the car farther away from the building.

Once you have selected a workout routine, one must consider how one will maintain and sustain these activities. First, consider what type of physical activity you enjoy. Next, assess your daily routines from the time you awaken to when you go to bed. Establish a plan for how you will implement at least 30 min of exercise throughout the day. This can be achieved in a 30 min segment or three, 10-min segments, three times a day. One simple strategy that we can do to remind us that it is time to move, is to set an alarm on your phone. Another strategy might be to plan to watch your favorite television show while you walk on the treadmill or ride a stationary bike while reading a book or a magazine.

In addition to implementing strategies that remind us to exercise, it is important for you to monitor personal activity goals. The literature indicates that when individuals monitor their physical activity goals they are more successful (Sullivan & Lachman, 2016). You can monitor or track your activity goals by using free consumer apps such as Lose-It or My Fitness Pal. You can also monitor your goals on paper. A written plan may encourage you to stay on track with your physical activity goals. The National Institute of Aging (2021) has free resources (electronic and printed) listed on their website for goal setting and planning your daily physical activity plan.

Well-chosen workout clothing can add to the enjoyment and safety of the physical activity. Your shoes should be flat with nonskid soles, have adequate heel support, and enough room for your toes. Wear clothes that let air circulate and let you move easily. In cold weather, wear layers such as a sweatshirt over a t-shirt, so you can take off layers as you warm up (American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society, 2018).

Even with the backdrop of COVID-19 and the need to keep social distance part of our activity routine, nurses can model how to engage in fun and healthy physical activity. Once you have a goal, a plan, and the right clothing, begin your physical activity program with low-intensity exercises. Make sure you start by performing warm-up exercises, such as marching in place, and, after your workout, cool down with exercises like stretching to prevent stiffness. Be sure you drink water before, during, and after your workout. Starting a daily physical activity program does not have to be overwhelming. Begin with three, 10-min walks and then gradually advance. These simple tips and strategies can help you establish health fitness habits that will last a lifetime.

Tara O'Brien

The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA

Correspondence

Tara O'Brien, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA.

Email: obrien.782@osu.edu

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