



ESTHER BUSH

## Physical activity

This month, the "Take Charge of Your Health Today" page focuses on physical activity. Jennifer R. Jones, MPH, community engagement coordinator with the University of Pittsburgh CTSI, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, sat down to have a lively conversation about the featured topic.

**JJ:** Good afternoon, and Happy New Year, Ms. Bush. Can you believe this is our first health page of 2016?

**EB:** Happy New Year to you, too, Jennifer. We're only a few days into 2016, and I have already heard much chatter about starting the New Year off right. Many friends and colleagues, myself included, are setting goals to be healthier in 2016. Physical activity is a timely topic for this month.

**JJ:** Yes, it is. I like that this page shows the importance of physical activity for both children and adults. There is so much research that shows us that physical activity is good for the entire body. As Dr. Ross mentions, being active has benefits for not only weight loss but for our brains, our hearts, our moods and even for our sleep patterns. Dr. Ross's overview highlights easy ways that people can fit physical activity in their normal daily routine.

**EB:** Our bodies are so intricately wired and the key to keeping them tuned up really is physical activity. I remember in a meeting we had recently that we were talking about Dr. Judy Cameron's research. She is part of CTSI. We were talking about a study she did that showed that monkeys walking on a treadmill had positive effects to their brains. It is really interesting – and encouraging!

**JJ:** I know! Those are results from a 2010 published study ([www.futurity.org/time-on-treadmill-shapes-up-the-brain/](http://www.futurity.org/time-on-treadmill-shapes-up-the-brain/)). I don't even think we fully understand yet how important physical activity is to our bodies. But researchers like those at the University of Pittsburgh Physical Activity and Weight Management Research Center are working on it.

**EB:** Yes, an important facility indeed. I'd encourage people to just walk—period. I don't care where or when, just move. Walk your animals, take walks with your grandchildren or walk up the steps. Find a partner to walk with, and make it fun. I'm going to take my own advice! Exercise is excellent, and it's rewarding.

**JJ:** Certainly! Thank you for your time, Ms. Bush. I wish you and all of our readers a happy and healthy 2016. Next month, we continue talking about an important aspect of health, the use of vitamins and supplements. There seems to be a trend to using these recently, and I am interested in hearing what research tells us about these additives.

For more information or with questions, e-mail [partners@hs.pitt.edu](mailto:partners@hs.pitt.edu).



## Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved. Physical activity helps to improve health

Are you one of many, many people in the U.S. who made a resolution to be healthier in 2016? One of the best ways to improve health is to be physically active. Physical activity helps people maintain or lose weight. It also helps the heart stay strong. But physical activity offers a wealth of additional health benefits that do not always get attention.

"People always tell me they want a magic pill to be healthy. I say physical activity is the magic pill," says Sharon E. Ross, PhD, assistant professor of health and physical activity at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. Getting enough physical activity has been proven to lower the risk of stroke, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. It helps reduce depression and anxiety. It improves how well people's brains function and improves sleep quality. But, unfortunately, even with all its benefits, people in the U.S. are not as physically active as they should be.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans (for people age 6 and older). For adults, the recommendation 75 minutes of

vigorous, 150 minutes of moderate and 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity on at least five days. This equals about 30 minutes of vigorous physical activity per day. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Health Interview Survey, only one in five adults in the U.S. meets the guidelines. Only 37 percent of African Americans meet the guidelines and only 43.1 percent of Asians and 47.6 percent of Whites do.

Why the majority of people in the U.S. do not meet the recommended guidelines for physical activity is hard to say. The reasons are individual and personal. Many people also have barriers to physical activity. These barriers can include transportation, time or the perception that they need money to join a gym. People's ideas about physical activity are hard to change. "People are afraid of the word 'exercise,'" says Dr. Ross. "It makes them think of being in pain, sweaty or even embarrassed."



SHARON E. ROSS, PHD

Dr. Ross's research involves physical activity promotion and obesity prevention in children and youths, focusing on Latino populations. She is now enrolling families in a program she developed called ÁNDALE Pittsburgh. The program involves training community health workers to go to people's homes. They share information about and do an activity focused on a health topic. They do some goal-setting with the families, engage in a physical activity and prepare a recipe. "We're trying to support families and give them the knowledge and tools to promote their health, growth and development," she says. (Information about en-

rolling in ÁNDALE Pittsburgh can be found elsewhere on the page.)

Dr. Ross says that a lot of research now focuses on sedentary behavior—too much sitting. "Not everyone has to go to the gym for an hour a day. Doing 10-minute bouts of brisk activity throughout the day gives similar benefits," she says. "I'm a physical activity researcher, and I don't go to the gym. I can follow exercise videos at home, play with my children, walk my dog and I like to go biking and hiking. It's all about finding what activity you like to do and finding chunks of time in your day."

Going to the gym may work for some people. For people who cannot afford or who do not want to go to a gym, Dr. Ross has several recommendations for people to insert more physical activity into their lives:

•If you have a job that requires you to sit most of the day, get up and take a short walk every 30-60 minutes. Pace while you are on the phone. Get a standing desk, if possible.

•Take your children to the park. Instead of sitting down on a bench, walk around or play with them.

•Park your car farther away from store entrances to get in some extra walking.

•If you watch TV, do jumping jacks or march in place during commercial breaks.

•If you enjoy family time, find an activity you can do with your family instead of watching a movie together.

•Find social support. Friends or loved ones can be active with you and keep you accountable.

•If time is a barrier, schedule physical activity time on your calendar.

•Cold weather is often cited as a barrier to physical activity. Dress warmly to enjoy winter walks, sledding, building a snowman, ice skating, walking in a mall, following an exercise video on YouTube or shoveling snow.

•Using a basic pedometer might encourage you to take the recommended 10,000 steps per day.

•Do housework or yard work briskly.

"Remember that physical activity can often be fun," says Dr. Ross. "Find something you like to do and stick with it."

## Let's Move—America's Move to Raise a Healthier Generation of Kids

Obesity rates are rising, especially in children. The numbers are even higher in Latino and African Ameri-

can children. The Let's Move campaign launched nationally in 2010, under the direction of First Lady

Michelle Obama. The primary focuses are to eat healthy and to be physically active. This movement is not just for children; it is for parents, grandparents, schools, communities and elected officials. Everyone will benefit from a healthy generation of children. More information, including resources and helpful tips for children and adults, can be found at [www.letsmove.gov/](http://www.letsmove.gov/).

There is also a Let's Move Pittsburgh program for Southwestern Pennsylvanians based at Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens. This is modeled after Michelle Obama's Let's Move initiative and provides many local resources and opportunities to be healthier.

See the website for more information: <https://phipps.conservatory.org/lets-move-pittsburgh>.



**GIMME FIVE**—Talk show host Ellen DeGeneres dances with First Lady Michelle Obama's as she takes part in Obama's #GimmeFive Challenge in honor of the 5th Anniversary of "Let's Move!" Initiative, March 12, 2015 at the Warner Bros. lot in Burbank, Calif. (AP Photo/Warner Bros., Mike Rozman)



**ZUMBA SESSION**—First Lady Michelle Obama participates in zumba session at a Miami parks and recreation center during a visit to promote her "Let's Move" campaign Feb. 25, 2014. (AP Photo/Joel Auerbach)

## Physical Activity and Weight Management Research Center

The Physical Activity and Weight Management Research Center at the University of Pittsburgh was established in 2002. It is under the direction of John M. Jakicic, PhD, professor and chair of health and physical activity at Pitt. The center's mission is to do research around prevention and treatment of obesity and people who are overweight.

Researchers with the center want to understand links between physical activity and a person's health, both physical health and mental. Studies for both adults and children are run through the center. The studies will help researchers know these health-related outcomes and to quantify the best dose of physical activity to maximize positive

health outcomes for people's bodies. Researchers with the center also translate their research findings to health care, health-fitness, and community-based settings. The faculty and staff form a multidisciplinary research team consisting of expertise in exercise, nutrition and behavior modification. The primary source of research funding is the

National Institutes of Health. People interested in obtaining more information about participating in ongoing research studies at the Physical Activity and Weight Management Research Center can contact 412-488-4184.

More information about the center can be found online at [www.physicalactivity.pitt.edu/](http://www.physicalactivity.pitt.edu/)