What happens to your body when you exercise?

Starting a new exercise routine may seem overwhelming, but regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

When beginning to exercise, studies show that changes can occur to the body’s heart, muscles, fat, bones and even the brain. Exercise also helps to maintain a healthy weight and increases the chances of living longer. “Start with five to ten minutes a day of aerobic exercise and work up to 30 minutes five days a week over the course of a few weeks,” says Dr. Dory Jarzabkowski, a cardiologist with the Advocate Heart Institute at BroMenn Medical Center in Normal, IL. “Some simple aerobic exercises include swimming, bicycling, walking, jogging or running.”

The CDC lists some of the major health benefits to starting an exercise routine:

**Heart** - Regular aerobic exercise (about 150 minutes per week) can lower a person’s risk for heart attack and stroke. Exercise has also been shown to reduce high blood pressure and cholesterol levels, as well as the risk for heart disease.

**Muscles and fat** - Endurance training, such as running or lifting weights, encourages the body to use stored fat as a source of energy. Exercise increases muscle mass, which in return causes more calories to be burned while at rest. An increase in muscle and a decrease in body fat can help you achieve a lower body mass index and leaner figure.

**Bones** - Performing weight-bearing exercises can increase bone density. As you move, your muscles pull on the bones, and the pulling stimulates an increase in bone density. Regular physical activity can also help manage arthritis pain and other joint conditions.

**Brain** - Physical activity can help keep thinking, learning and judgment skills sharp as a person ages. It can reduce the risk of depression and anxiety while improving overall mood and feelings of well-being. Exercise can also promote better sleep.

“Don’t become discouraged if you don’t lose weight; muscle weighs more than fat,” says Dr. Jarzabkowski. “As you become more toned, you will notice changes like your clothes becoming looser, even if the scale does not show much difference.” Regular exercise has many positive short- and long-term health benefits.

*Dear God, help us honor the bodies you have given us by keeping them active and healthy. Amen.*

4 tips to get your kids moving

It’s probably not a big surprise that the majority of children aren’t meeting the national guidelines for physical activity - 30 minutes of daily physical activity. Dr. Vipul Singla, a pediatrician on staff at Advocate Children’s Hospital in Park Ridge, IL, believes that by seeking out activities they enjoy, kids are more likely to stay physically active. “Not everyone likes sports, and often, we think of sports as the only option for physical activity. Biking, walking your dog, roller skating or blading are all great ways to be active,” says Dr. Singla. “If we can make an activity enjoyable for our kids, then it doesn’t have to be something that is forced.”

Dr. Singla also points out that physical activity is just one piece of the puzzle. “As kids become more active, staying properly hydrated and getting enough rest is important for them to be at their best,” he says. “As they are growing and their bodies are developing, doing the little things is the basis for their health and well-being into the future.”

Check out Dr. Singla’s tips for encouraging children to lead healthier lives:

1. **Make time for activity.** Parents want their kids to succeed and, understandably, schedule lots of study time, music classes and other extracurricular activities, but often don’t do the same with exercise. Help them make time for physical activity by planning it.

2. **Turn off the screen(s).** Kids are being inundated with screen time from a very young age. As a parent, the popular cartoon Peppa Pig can provide a great distraction, but parents and caregivers shouldn’t become dependent on those screens to serve as part-time sitters. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children and teens should engage with entertainment media for no more than one or two hours per day, and that should be high-quality content.

3. **Lead by example.** Children who see their parents being active are more likely to follow in their footsteps. If kids see that sports and physical activity can be fun, they are more likely to participate themselves. It’s also a good idea to play sports and be active with your child. By helping them learn a new sport, you are encouraging and promoting activity.

4. **Give the gift of activity.** For birthdays and holidays, suggest that family and friends bring gifts that help encourage outdoor activities, such as balls, jump ropes and other active toys.