

What's the ideal amount of exercise for a healthy life?

Exercise has had a Goldilocks problem, with experts debating just how much exercise is too little, too much or just the right amount to improve health and longevity. Two new, impressively large-scale studies provide some clarity, suggesting that the ideal dose of exercise for a long life is a bit more than many of us currently believe we should get, but less than many of us might expect. The studies also found that prolonged or intense exercise is unlikely to be harmful and could add years to people's lives.

But unlike medicine, exercise does not come with dosing instructions. The current broad guidelines from governmental and health organizations call for 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week to build and maintain health and fitness.

But whether that amount of exercise represents the least amount that someone should do — the minimum recommended dose — or the ideal amount has not been certain.

Scientists also have not known whether there is a safe upper limit on exercise, beyond which its effects become potentially dangerous; and whether some intensities of exercise are more effective than others at prolonging lives.

So the new studies, both of which were published last week in JAMA Internal Medicine, helpfully tackle those questions.

The sweet spot for exercise benefits, they found, came among those who tripled the recommended level of exercise, working out moderately, mostly by walking, for 450 minutes per week, or a little more than an hour per day. Those people were 39 percent less likely to die prematurely than people who never exercised.

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