

# Are Your Patients Using This Anti-COVID Secret Weapon?

Author: Lisa Jhung, 10 January 2023

If your patients vowed to start exercising this year, here's another incentive to help them stick to their guns: They could protect themselves from potentially devastating COVID-19 outcomes like hospitalization and even death.

The evidence is piling up that physical activity can lower the risk of getting very sick from COVID. The CDC, based on a systematic review of the evidence, has reported that "physical activity is associated with a decrease in COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths, while inactivity increases that risk." Other research has linked regular physical activity with a lower risk of infection, hospitalization, and death from COVID.

The latest such study, from Kaiser Permanente, suggests that exercise in almost any amount can cut the risk of severe or fatal COVID even among high-risk patients like those with hypertension or cardiovascular disease.

"We found that every level of physical activity provided some level of protection," says lead study author Deborah Rohm Young, PhD, director of the Division of Behavioural Research for Kaiser's Southern California Department of Research and Evaluation. "Even a 10-minute walk [per] week is associated with better COVID-19 outcomes."

The best outcomes were seen among "those who are consistently meeting our national guidelines of greater than 150 minutes a week of at least brisk walking," she says. That's 30 minutes of exercise 5 days a week. However, "every bit is beneficial."

Yet, 1 in 4 adults don't get any physical activity outside of their jobs, according to the CDC. That matters as we move into January and COVID numbers trend up. As of press time, the CDC is reporting more than 470,000 weekly cases, compared to about 265,000 for the week ending Oct. 12. On average, over 6,000 people were admitted to the hospital per day from Dec. 31 to Jan. 6, and deaths totalled 2,731 weekly as of Jan. 4.

"The missing aspect in our response to the public health challenge of COVID has been the heightened need for personal and community well-health," says Gene Olinger, PhD, chief science advisor for research company MRI Global, and an adjunct associate professor at Boston University School of Medicine. "Proactive medicine – where individuals optimize nutrition, exercise, sleep, and whole-body meditation – is not a priority in the current health ecosystem. It is changing, and this is good news."

Of course, everyone should still get vaccinated, Young cautions, and not rely on exercise and healthy living alone to ward off severe COVID. "The more we can do to protect ourselves from having bad COVID, it should all be done."

# Are Your Patients Using This Anti-COVID Secret Weapon?

Author: Lisa Jhung, 10 January 2023

## **The More Activity Prior to Infection, the Better**

In the Kaiser study, the researchers looked at health records for 194,191 Kaiser adult patients who tested positive for COVID-19 between January 2020 and May 2021.