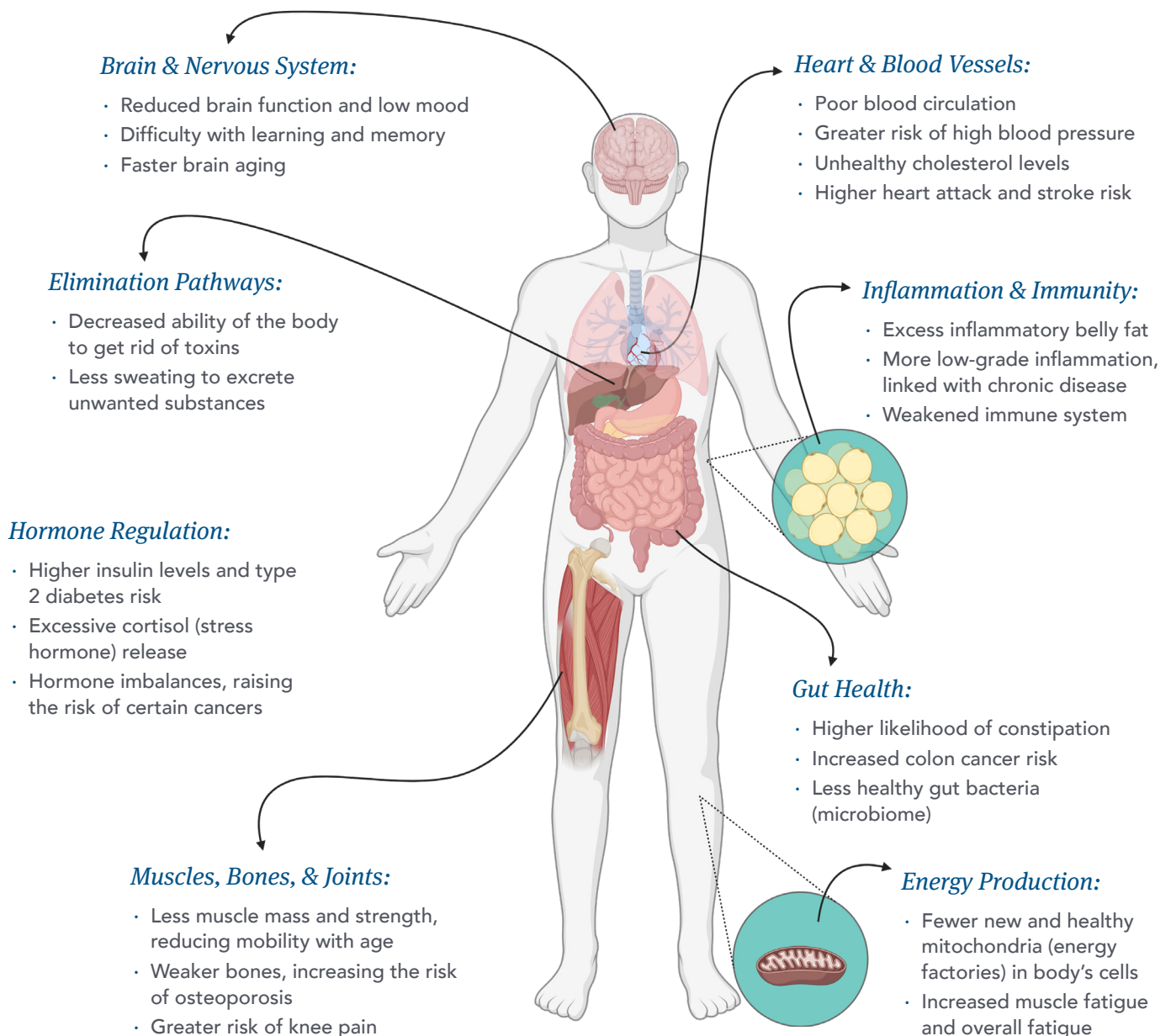


# Effects of Physical Inactivity

Your body was designed to move. If you don't exercise enough and sit too much, you are at greater risk of chronic diseases, especially as you age. These chronic health concerns include heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers (including breast and colon), osteoporosis, dementia, and depression. The following diagram shows potential harmful changes in the body and health risks linked with sitting too much and not getting enough physical activity.



## *Guidelines for Physical Activity*

Adults need both aerobic (cardio) and muscle-strengthening activity to support health. Examples of aerobic activity are brisk walking, jogging, dancing, bicycling, and swimming. Examples of muscle-strengthening activity are lifting weights, using resistance bands, and doing body-weight exercises like push-ups. Finding a variety of activities you enjoy is key. Below are guidelines for each activity type.

### *Aerobic Activity*

Aim for 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity per week. If desired, you can do a mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. In general, 1 minute of vigorous-intensity activity equals 2 minutes of moderate-intensity activity.

- Gauge intensity with the talk test: If you can talk but not sing during physical activity, it is likely moderate-intensity activity. If you can't say more than a few words without pausing for a breath, it is likely vigorous-intensity activity.
- High-intensity interval training (HIIT), which alternates between short bursts of intense exercise and brief recovery periods, is considered vigorous-intensity activity.
- Spread your aerobic activity minutes throughout the week, preferably across three or more days.
- If you are already pretty active, consider progressing to more than 300 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week. However, avoid overexercise, which is signaled by an inability to recover between workouts or declining performance.

### *Muscle Strengthening Activity*

Do muscle-strengthening activity of moderate or greater intensity at least two days a week.

- Repeat strength exercises until the muscle is fatigued. For example, you might do 8 to 12 repetitions of bicep curls.
- Work all major muscle groups of your body, including the arms, shoulders, legs, hips, back, chest, and abdomen.
- Avoid exercising the same muscle groups two days in a row. Your muscles need time to recover.

### *Sitting Less*

Getting the recommended amount of physical activity per week is not enough to avoid all of the health risks of excess sitting. Make a special effort to sit less at work and home. Refer to IFM's [Increasing Movement During the Workday](#) handout for easy exercises to break up long periods of sitting.

### *Readiness for Physical Activity*

Remember, if you have a chronic health condition, such as diabetes or heart disease, consult your primary care physician before starting a physical activity program. Some other tips to keep in mind include:

- Choose activities suited to your current fitness level and abilities.
- Consult a physical activity specialist for guidance on appropriate activities.
- Do your best. If your current fitness level or a chronic condition prevents you from doing the minimum 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity, start slow. Even adding small amounts of physical activity can support health.

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