

# It's Never Too Late to Move for Health

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Good morning and thank you, Senator Craig and Senator Breaux, for holding this very important hearing.

My name is Lynn Swann. Some of you may know me as a Pittsburgh Steeler or an ABC Sports broadcaster. Today, I'm here as chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports to talk about healthy aging. I bring you greetings and best wishes from two American leaders who are over fifty, like me: President Bush, and HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson.

President Bush is asking all Americans to do a little bit of what he does every day. His commitment to physical activity is well-known. He's an avid runner and works out in a gym regularly despite a demanding schedule. The First Lady is another great role model – she's an avid walker and often rides an exercise bicycle. Secretary Thompson has also taken the physical activity message to heart – he has become more physically active and has lost 15 pounds.

President Bush says that "better health is an individual responsibility and an important national goal." He's right -- a healthy, active America is a prepared America, able to meet any challenge. Today, our nation is fighting a war on two fronts. The war against terrorism and tyranny is well known.

But the second war is a silent one, the war against chronic diseases that are killing Americans and driving up health care costs. Surgeon General Richard Carmona calls it "the terror within." Our nation's poor eating habits and sedentary lifestyles are killing nearly 1,000 Americans every day. The cost of obesity and type 2 diabetes combined is \$250 billion a year.

Congress can't pass a law to make us healthy. Building a healthy nation requires a change in the lifestyle of each individual citizen across the life span. To older Americans we say, "It's never too late to move for health." And it's never too late to start adopting physically active behaviors. Living an active lifestyle can help expand your vigorous years and quality of life well past age fifty, sixty, seventy, and beyond. Some of the other witnesses who will speak later this morning prove the invigorating power of the active lifestyle. The Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health says that people of all ages, both male and female, benefit from regular physical activity.

Thirty minutes of moderate physical activity on 5 or more days a week reduces the risk of developing or dying from:

- heart disease,
- high blood pressure,
- colon cancer,
- type 2 diabetes.

Building physical activity into your daily routine can help add years to your life and can make your older years a high quality time of life.

Physical activity helps maintain a healthy weight and improves mental health. And, of course, physical activity is important for the health of muscles, bones, and joints. This is particularly important for seniors, who are at risk for arthritis and osteoporosis. Yet only about 15 of every 100 Americans ages 45 to 74 are active for the recommended 30 minutes a day, five days a week. That figure drops to only 12 out of 100 over age 75 (source: Healthy People 2010, Focus Area 22, Physical Activity, page 22-10/11).

The prescription for all Americans age fifty and over is the same as it is for all adults: moderate activity for 30 minutes a day on five or more days a week. The result can be significant health benefits.

So, what is moderate physical activity? I'm a professional athlete, and I love to workout. But you don't need to sweat in a gym, run a marathon, or play sports to gain the health benefits of an active lifestyle. Take a walk after dinner, play catch with your kids or grandkids, take the stairs instead of the elevator or mow your lawn. As I said before, it's never too late to move for health.

To fulfill the vision of a "Healthier US," the President, the Secretary and the Council are asking each American to:

- Be physically active every day
- Eat a nutritious diet
- Get preventive screenings, and
- Avoid risky behaviors.

To spotlight our efforts for a healthier nation, the Secretary is hosting a national summit next month in Baltimore (April 15-16) to highlight policies that promote healthy environments and model programs that communities and companies across America are already using to promote physical activity.

As the Council members and I travel around the country, we are doing more than quote sad health statistics. We are offering a tool to get all Americans, including seniors, to start moving today. That tool is the "President's Challenge," a program to motivate everyone to start moving today and stay active for a lifetime. You or your kids or your grandkids may have participated in the President's Challenge in school. But this program has been expanded to include Americans of all ages.

Today, I am challenging you, Senators, to start moving 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Participate in the "President's Challenge" by keeping track of your physical activity on this log.

In six weeks, you can earn a Presidential Adult Active Lifestyle Award.

Every activity counts — walking, climbing the stairs, raking leaves, digging in the garden, mopping the floor, biking, dancing, any physical activity!

As I said before, all types of physical activity count. And you don't have to do it at one time — you can accumulate 30 minutes a day in smaller increments of just 5 or 10 minutes.

Later this year, Americans will be able to keep track of their activities online as they earn Presidential awards. We'll be launching a new President's Challenge website that is interactive and free of charge.

In closing, here's my challenge to you: take the President's Challenge and challenge your family to join you; challenge your constituents and staff to join you. There is a President's Council award for children, teens and adults.

Most importantly, I ask you to challenge the older people in your life to start moving – at home, in retirement communities, at senior centers. Let them know "You're never too old to move for health."

Please tell your constituents, particularly older Americans, to "Be physically active every day." Tell them in your speeches and press conferences and during your visits to senior centers—any time you speak about health. Please promote the active lifestyle, promote a Healthier US. Together, step-by-step, day-by-day, we can build a healthier U.S. for Americans of all ages and abilities. Remember: "It's never too late to move for health."

Thank you for inviting me to testify on this most important topic. At this time I would be happy to respond to any questions.