

SECOND EDITION

# *Active Living* Every Day

**Get active  
with a proven  
step-by-step  
program**

*Includes  
access to  
ALED Online*



**Steven N. Blair • Andrea L. Dunn • Bess H. Marcus  
Ruth Ann Carpenter • Peter Jaret**

**Foreword by Russell R. Pate**

# Active Living Every Day

SECOND EDITION

**Steven N. Blair, PED**

Arnold School of Public Health,  
University of South Carolina

**Andrea L. Dunn, PhD**

Klein Buendel, Inc., Golden, CO

**Bess H. Marcus, PhD**

Department of Family and Preventive Medicine  
University of California, San Diego

**Ruth Ann Carpenter, MS, RD**

Health Integration, LLC

**Peter Jaret, MA**



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Web site: [www.HumanKinetics.com](http://www.HumanKinetics.com)

*United States:* Human Kinetics  
P.O. Box 5076  
Champaign, IL 61825-5076  
800-747-4457  
e-mail: [humank@hkusa.com](mailto:humank@hkusa.com)

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Windsor, ON N8Y 2L5  
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*Europe:* Human Kinetics  
107 Bradford Road  
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Leeds LS28 6AT, United Kingdom  
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e-mail: [hk@hkeurope.com](mailto:hk@hkeurope.com)

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57A Price Avenue  
Lower Mitcham, South Australia 5062  
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e-mail: [info@hkaustralia.com](mailto:info@hkaustralia.com)

*New Zealand:* Human Kinetics  
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Torrens Park, South Australia 5062  
0800 222 062  
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Welcome to Active Living Every Day! We are happy that you've joined us, and we look forward to assisting you in achieving your physical activity goals. Having energy, feeling good, and reducing your risk for disease are all benefits of healthy living. You can achieve these benefits with Active Living Every Day.

We are pleased to provide access to an online resource that supplements *Active Living Every Day, Second Edition*. This resource is an interactive component that you use with the *Active Living Every Day, Second Edition* book, and it outlines a 12-session program for adopting a more active lifestyle. You will find tracking tools, downloadable forms, links to helpful Web sites, and suggested readings for additional help in increasing your level of physical activity. We are certain you will enjoy this unique online learning experience.

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# Foreword

People in Western societies are becoming increasingly more sedentary. We sit in front of televisions and computers for endless hours. We rarely transport ourselves to work or school by walking or riding bicycles. We gravitate to elevators and escalators to avoid climbing stairs. Our occupations involve far less physical activity than they once did. And relatively few of us routinely engage in planned exercise. One result of these trends is the obesity epidemic. But obesity is only the most visible health problem associated with physical inactivity. Heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and mental health problems occur at much higher rates than they would if most people led physically active lives.

Although the health effects of physical activity are understood now better than ever, the recommendation that we live active lives is far from new. As early as the fifth century BC, Hippocrates recommended regular walking and other forms of moderate activity to promote health and treat illness. In the modern era, prominent health and medical organizations, including the American College of Sports Medicine, American Heart Association, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, have recommended regular physical activity for virtually all segments of the population. In 2008, the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services released the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, an extensive research-based document that called on all adults to engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each week.

One way to accumulate 150 minutes of moderate physical activity in a week is to walk briskly for 30 minutes per day, five days per week. That's not an intimidating or unattainable amount of exercise for the typical person, yet most of us aren't doing it. Some people think they are too busy to be physically active. Others don't know how to get started. Some know how to start but don't know how to maintain an active lifestyle. And some just find the whole idea to be overwhelming.

If one of those statements describes you, or if you're already active but need some new ideas and fresh strategies, this book is for you. *Active Living Every Day* is a tested and proven program for improving your health and well-being through physical activity. It provides information, skills, and a step-by-step process for creating an active lifestyle. Try it and see what a difference physical activity can make in your life. I encourage you to get started today.

Russell R. Pate, PhD

University of South Carolina

Arnold School of Public Health, Department of Exercise Science

# You've Come to the Right Place!

By opening this book, you've taken the first important step toward becoming physically active. To make any change for the better, you have to *want* to change. The fact that you're here means you've taken that first step. This program will help you succeed.

There are plenty of good reasons to add physical activity to your life. Something as simple as a half hour of brisk walking every day can make a big difference in your health and how you feel about your life. Pushing yourself a little harder can increase the benefits. Here are some results you can expect:

- More energy
- Brighter mental outlook
- Reduced risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes
- Reduced risk of colon and breast cancer
- Less chance of colds and flu
- Healthy bones, joints, and muscles
- Better weight control
- Maintained fitness and flexibility
- Reduced risk of depression
- Improved sleep quality
- Healthier and longer independent life

If a pill could offer so many benefits, we'd all want to take it, yet more than 50 percent of Americans still aren't active enough for their own good. Why? Because it's easy to be inactive. Labor-saving devices such as cars, elevators, riding mowers, and washing machines have taken over tasks that used to demand physical effort. According to one estimate, most of us burn 700 to 800 fewer calories each day going about our lives than people did just 30 years ago (James et al. 1995).

What can we do? One option is to find time to exercise. Some people can manage to fit in a workout three to five times a week. But not everyone likes to exercise. Many of us are busy with work and family. We barely have enough time in the day to do what we need to do, let alone what we know we should do.

Or so we think.

In fact, there are simple, easy, and enjoyable ways to add activity to your life. Walking instead of driving, climbing the stairs instead of taking the elevator, dancing, and riding a bike all offer good ways to incorporate activity into your lifestyle. Together, they add up to better health, a fitter body, and a potentially longer life.



You can find many ways to add physical activity to your daily life.

## A Step-by-Step Plan That Works—We Can Prove It

Most people don't need to be convinced that they should become active. They simply need to learn how to fit physical activity into their lives. That's why we've put together this step-by-step program that is based on scientifically tested methods.

Here's a little background. Beginning in the mid-1950s, exercise scientists focused almost exclusively on the health and fitness benefits of vigorous and sustained exercise. Then work by Dr. Steven Blair and others helped to spark a new way of thinking about physical activity. These studies showed that men and women who were moderately fit had a substantially lower risk for heart disease, stroke, and premature death than those who were unfit and sedentary. The benefits of being moderately fit applied to almost everyone: smokers and nonsmokers, people with high cholesterol or high blood pressure, even those with a family history of early cardiovascular disease. Surprisingly, even obese people who were moderately fit had lower death rates than thin people who were unfit. What mattered was the amount of exercise people did, not how intense the activity was.

With those findings in mind, we designed a study, *Project Active*, to test a lifestyle approach compared with a standard fitness-center approach to increase and maintain physical activity. We recruited 235 men and women who were currently doing little or no exercise. Half of them committed to doing a standard gym workout three to five times a week. The others, part of our lifestyle group, met in small groups to talk about ways to incorporate physical activities such as walking and stair-climbing into their everyday lives.

By almost every measure, men and women in the lifestyle group enjoyed the same benefits as the people who worked out at the fitness center. After two years, their average blood pressures dropped. They lost the same amount of body fat. They were burning the same number of extra calories from activity as the hard-core gym goers. They also gained the same improvements in fitness. For years after our program

Many participants in our program found activities they enjoyed.





Small lifestyle changes, such as taking the stairs, can greatly improve your health.

ended, many participants were still maintaining an active lifestyle. It seems that many people find it easier to stick with activities that are part of their daily lives rather than gym routines (Dunn et al. 1999).

Our findings showed that almost anyone who is sedentary and unfit can benefit enormously from becoming just moderately fit through physical activity. That's great news. It means you can gain the benefits of physical activity at the gym *or* on your own.

To make active living available to people everywhere, we transformed the research materials from Project *Active* into the Active Living Every Day (ALED) program. Over 34,000 copies of the book have been sold worldwide. Most of the books have been used in ALED programs delivered by 175 nonprofit organizations, corporations, public health departments, health care groups, and research institutions. Research studies using ALED have shown that it

- helps older adults increase their physical activity (Wilcox et al. 2008),
- helps people with arthritis become more active (Callahan et al. 2007),
- can be successfully implemented using an Internet format to increase physical activity and reduce cardiovascular risk among overweight adults (Carr et al. 2008), and
- helps people maintain their new, higher physical activity level for at least six months (Wilcox et al. 2008) and as long as two years (Dunn et al. 1999).

For these reasons, our program can help almost anyone become more active.

## Making a Change for the Better

We've based this book on the latest psychological research about behavior change and our experiences using the program. But we've gone a step further. The original Project *Active* program lasted 20 weeks. More recently we tested a shorter 12-week version of the same program. It proved to be just as effective in helping people make lasting physical activity changes. This revised edition of ALED is based on a 12-session program. We think it will appeal to more people and thus encourage more people to become active.

Thanks to feedback from our volunteers, we were able to create a program based on what people need, want, and enjoy. We saw what worked and what didn't. From our participants' experiences, we've put together one of the first scientifically tested programs for increasing lifestyle physical activity. Unlike many other programs, ours

- considers your readiness to change behavior,
- emphasizes moderate-intensity activities,
- helps you increase the intensity of your activities if you wish,
- lets you create your own activity plan,
- helps you solve problems and overcome obstacles,
- concentrates on activities you can add to your daily routine, and
- gives you tips for making other healthy changes in your life.

# How to Use This Book

Making lifelong changes takes time and commitment, but it can happen. Before you get started, a few simple tips can help you get the most out of this book.

## 1. Take One Step at a Time

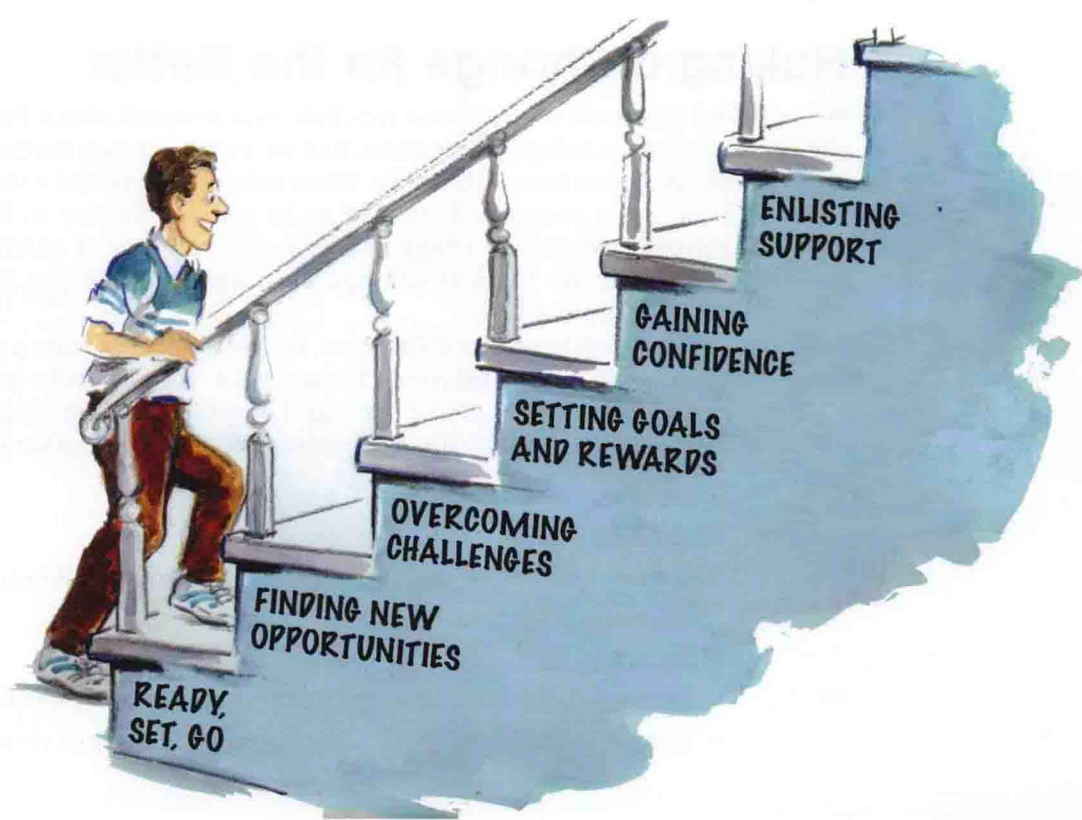
It's natural to want to rush in and make big changes all at once, especially when you've made up your mind to become more active. However, plenty of studies have shown that the best way for most of us to make lasting changes is one step at a time, experimenting until we find what works for us. That's why we encourage you to follow the steps in each chapter.

## 2. Go at Your Own Pace

We designed this book for you to go through one chapter each week. You may end up going through one chapter quickly and another more slowly. All we ask is that you go through each chapter completely and fully apply the skills you are learning. As you increase your everyday physical activities, you may find you want to do more. For example, you may want to go for a longer walk than usual, or you may want to do something more vigorous than a walk. Go for it. The more you do, the better off you'll be. If you get bogged down and need a refresher, feel free to return to a previous chapter. Our participants often found that they learned something new or improved their understanding by reviewing material from earlier in the program.

## 3. Track Your Progress

Throughout this book, we ask you to write down information. It's important to keep track of your progress so you'll know where you started and what you've achieved. You may also want to buy a pocket-sized notebook to keep with you during the day so you don't have to lug the book around. Later we'll talk about step counters—nifty



devices that can help you track your progress. For many of our participants, step counters were tremendously helpful.

## 4. Check Out the Active Living Every Day Online Web Site



The ALED Online Web site ([www.activeliving.info](http://www.activeliving.info)) offers supporting resources for each chapter in the book. Whenever you see this icon in the left margin in this book, you'll find on the ALED Online Web site more in-depth information on topics addressed in the chapter, links to related Web sites, downloadable forms, and resources that will supplement the information in the chapter. There are even community boards where you can connect with others who are using the ALED program. This information is updated regularly to keep it relevant and timely.

To help you along your ALED journey and make this book simple to use, we've added signposts:



**Activity Alerts** spotlight the activities we'd like you to do in each chapter.



**Myth Busters** debunk some common misconceptions about physical activity and lifestyle changes—misconceptions that get in the way of you becoming active.



**Real Life** offers composite sketches of people who have successfully adopted active lifestyles.



**Did You Know?** offers surprising facts about physical activity and its benefits, many of which include the latest research findings from around the world.



**Weighing In** highlights advice for people interested in achieving a healthy weight.

Congratulations again on picking up this book. We are confident that this book will help you become active, fit, and healthy as it has done for thousands of others. We look forward to helping you become active every day.

Now let's get started!

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The second edition of *Active Living Every Day* (ALED) is significantly revised—and we believe, improved—thanks to the nearly 10 years of experience that have ensued since the program was launched. During that time, ALED users gave us feedback on how the program works—or doesn’t—in the “real world.” We would like to especially thank the many people who were involved in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Active for Life program. We are grateful to members of the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio, OASIS Institute, Greater Detroit Area Health Council, FirstHealth of the Carolinas, Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington, the National Program Office at Texas A&M Health Science Center’s School of Rural Public Health, and Dr. Sara Wilcox and the evaluation team at the Arnold School of Public Health at the University of South Carolina for their implementation and testing of a 12-session version of the ALED program. Their ideas, experiences, and guidance have led to our decision to release the second edition as a 12-session program.

In addition, we would like to thank our colleagues at Human Kinetics who have shared our passion for helping people attain the many health benefits that a physically active life can offer. Special appreciation goes to Michele Guerra, who guided the initial development of the ALED program to be something much more than this book. Also, the program would not have been sustained over this past decade without Michelle Maloney’s management expertise, and we are grateful for her dedication. Finally, we thank Amy Stahl, our editor for the second edition, for her guidance and support.

Steven N. Blair  
Andrea L. Dunn  
Bess H. Marcus  
Ruth Ann Carpenter  
Peter Jaret

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# Chapter One

## Ready, Set, Go

### In This Chapter

- Thinking about successful habit changes
- Identifying your readiness for change
- Taking a look at how you spend your time
- Finding time to get up and move
- Assessing the need to check with your doctor before increasing activity

This book was inspired by Project *Active*, our program showing that an active lifestyle can offer most of the benefits of a formal exercise regimen. As exercise scientists, we have always been inspired by the volunteers in our programs, who often overcome obstacles in order to become more active. We'd like to begin by sharing three success stories from Project *Active*. They may inspire you and offer insights into how people successfully change habits and lifestyles.





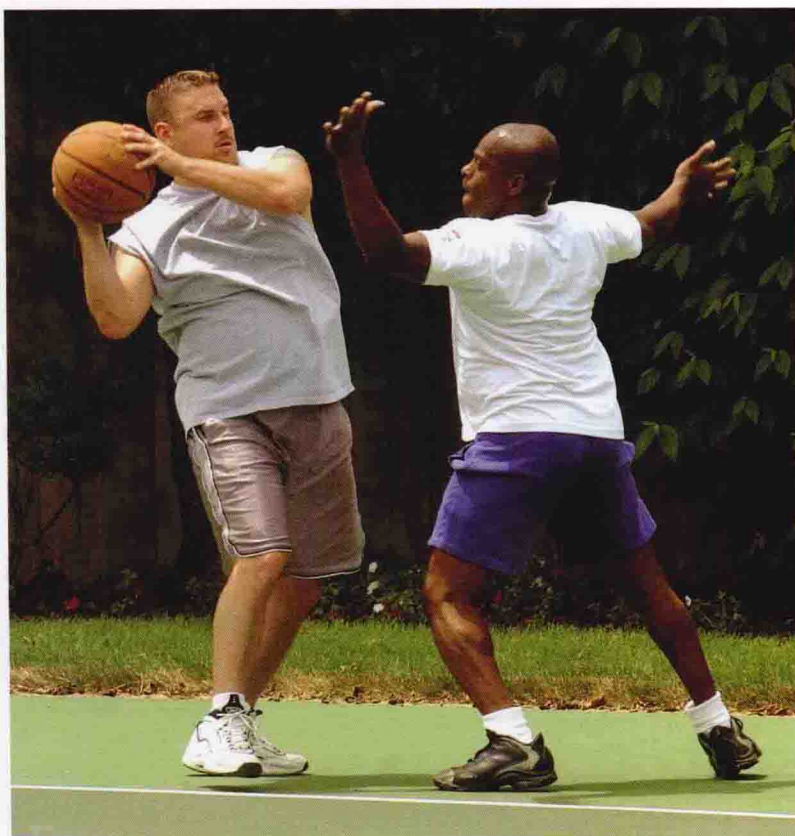
## Real Life

Although Yolanda was retired, she was the primary caregiver to her two young grandchildren. She didn't have much time for exercise. Plus, she had arthritis in her knees, so moving hurt sometimes. Our program showed her that she didn't have to do all her exercise at once to get health benefits. Instead, she could devote the brief segments of time she had each day to fit in 5 or 10 minutes of walking. Eventually she added stairs to her walking routine. After 13 months, she was accumulating 45 minutes of activity at least four days a week. She also began to plan more physical activities to do with her grandkids on the weekend. Yolanda discovered that as she built more strength in her legs, her arthritis pain diminished significantly.

Tommy was on several varsity teams in high school. He stopped playing sports because the community college he went to didn't have athletic teams. As a building-supplies salesperson, he spent a lot of time in the car going between job sites. Occasionally he played a pickup game of basketball. Unfortunately, frequent knee injuries often kept him sidelined. He joined our program at his doctor's recommendation after he was diagnosed with prediabetes. He learned that doing activities at a moderate intensity could lower his risk of advancing to diabetes. That was motivation enough to push him. Tommy learned to think ahead about situations (e.g., injuries, work crises, family time commitments) that

might sidetrack his physical activity. He also learned to plan alternative strategies. He cycled instead of ran when he was injured. He walked five minutes at each job site when he couldn't fit in a regular workout. Over time, he found many ways to enjoy his family and be active at the same time.

Gwen started the program with the primary intent to lose weight. She had tried all the miracle cures and fad diets, with short-term success and long-term regrets. Even in our program, she got frustrated at first when she didn't lose a lot of weight quickly. We encouraged her to consider the benefits other than weight loss, such as feeling more energetic and more positive about her life. That helped get her through the rough patches. Eventually, by being more active and paying closer attention to her diet, she began to lose weight. Many experts think the slow approach is both healthier and more likely to result in lasting weight loss.



We will show you ways to fit physical activity into your everyday life.

Similar to Yolanda, Tommy, and Gwen, you probably have your own reasons for wanting to be more active. If you're like many of the participants in our program, this isn't the first time you've tried to make a healthy change in your life. Maybe you've quit smoking or cut back on the fat in your diet. Maybe you've started a new hobby or signed up for a course at the community college. Even small changes, such as fastening your seatbelt every time you get in the car or switching from sugary soft drinks to no-calorie beverages, are important. They prove that you can change your habits for the better. This book will help you identify ways you can succeed in living an active life every day. Let's start by looking at habits you have already changed for the better.



## Activity Alert

### My Personal Successes—Habits I've Changed for the Better

Take a few minutes now to list one or more of your personal success stories. Think about unwanted habits you've dropped or good ones you've adopted. Then consider why you were able to make a successful change, even a small one. What helped you stick with it? What got in your way? Maybe your biggest obstacle was having enough time, getting distracted during a holiday, or losing your determination. Think about two or three habits you've changed and fill in the following form. You can download a copy of this form from the Active Living Every Day (ALED) Online Web site.



Habits I've changed	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Things that helped me succeed	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Obstacles that got in my way	
1.	
2.	
3.	

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By thinking about your past efforts, you can begin to identify some of the things that have helped or hindered your past efforts to make changes for the better. Now let's focus on the process of changing a habit.