**Physical activity**

This month, the "Take Charge of Your Health Today" column features physical activity, a topic Jennifer L. Ross, PhD, assistant professor of health education at the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Education, is particularly passionate about.

Eston Bush

**Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved. Physical activity helps improve health.**

You are one of many, many people in the U.S. who made a resolution to be healthier in 2017. One of the best ways to improve health is to be physically active. Physical activity helps people maintain or lose weight. It also helps the heart stay strong, and it reduces the risk of developing diseases like cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and mental health disorders. Physical activity offers a wealth of physical, emotional, and social benefits that do not always get attention.

"People always tell me they want a magic pill to be healthy. I say physical activity is the magic pill," says Sharon E. Ross, PhD, assistant professor of health education at the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Education. Getting enough physical activity has been proven to lower the risk of stroke, heart disease, and some cancers. It helps reduce depression and anxiety. It improves how well your brain function and improves sleep quality. But, unfortunately, even with all the benefits, people in the U.S. are not as physically active as they should be.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans (for people age 5 and older). For adults, the recommended 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week.

Obesity rates are rising, especially in children. The numbers are even higher in Latin and African-American children. The Let’s Move! America’s Move to Raise a Healthier Generation of Kids campaign, launched nationally in 2010, under the direction of First Lady Michelle Obama. The primary focuses are to eat healthy and be physically active. This movement is not just for children; it is for parents, caregivers, schools, communities and elected officials. Everyone will benefit from a healthy generation of children. More information, including resources and weight tips for children and adults, can be found at www.letsmove.gov.

ZURBA SESSION—First Lady Michelle Obama participates in Zumba session at a Miami park and recreation center during the Miami stop for “Let’s Move” campaign Feb. 20, 2014. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)