



HEALTH AND FITNESS

GETTING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE THIS NEW YEAR



Physical inactivity has been identified as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality accounting for 6% of deaths globally.

When combined with good nutrition, physical activity helps improve overall health and fitness. People who are physically active tend to live longer, maintain a healthy weight, and are at reduced risk for many chronic diseases including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, and some cancers.

This month we take a closer look at physical activity, exploring the benefits of increased physical activity, recommended levels of physical activity and some tips on increasing activity levels.

Physical activity and exercise

Physical activity is any movement that works the body's muscles and requires energy to be expended. The term physical activity is often used interchangeably with the term exercise. However, exercise is just one type of physical activity which is planned, structured and intended to improve or maintain physical fitness.

Physical activity includes exercise as well as other activities carried out as part of daily life, for example walking the dog, taking the stairs, doing house work or mowing the lawn.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular physical activity is vital for maintaining a good standard of health. Helping to:

Control weight

Good nutrition and physical activity are critical for attaining and maintaining a healthy weight. Inactivity leads to less calories being burnt. People who live a sedentary lifestyle can easily take in more calories every day than they use through exercise and normal daily activities.

Reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes

Regular physical activity and exercise can help to delay or prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes.

Improve mental health

Physical activity stimulates chemicals in the brain which can help maintain wellbeing and good mental health, improving self-esteem and self-control.

Reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease

Increased physical activity can have a dramatic impact on heart health, helping to lower blood pressure and improve cholesterol levels.

Improve sleep

Studies have shown that physically active people enjoy better quality sleep than inactive people, and are more alert throughout the day.

Reduce the risk of some cancers

Higher levels of physical activity are linked with lowering the risks of several cancers. Studies have shown that physically active people have a 50% lower risk of developing colon cancer than those who are not active.

Improve bone and muscle strength

Physical activity is critical for strong muscles and bones. Muscle strength and bone density decline with increasing age. Moderate aerobic activity and strength training can build muscle and slow the loss of bone density.

Increase longevity

Increased physical activity is associated with an increase in life expectancy.

MODERATE AND VIGOROUS ACTIVITY

For any type of activity to benefit health, individuals need to be moving quick enough to raise their heart rate, breathe faster and feel warmer. The intensity of physical activity can be classified as moderate or vigorous. **Moderate activity** is when the heart is beating slightly faster and the breathing is slightly harder than normal.

Examples of moderate activity include:

Walking to school	Dog walking	Housework
Playground play	Rollerblading	Leisure cycling

Vigorous activity is when the heart is beating much faster and the breathing is much harder than normal.

Examples of vigorous activity include:

Jogging	Hiking	Lifting loads
Swimming	Team sports such as rugby, soccer or netball	Fast cycling

HOW MUCH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DO WE NEED?

Recommended types and intensity of physical activity which a person should be engaged in are determined by age and overall health.

The recommendations outlined below are relevant to all healthy individuals in specified age groups, unless specific medical conditions indicate to the contrary.

Regardless of age, anyone who is physically inactive will benefit from an increase in physical activity.

Individuals should check with their doctor before any significant increase in physical activity, especially if they have been inactive for a prolonged period, have chronic health problems or any other concerns.

The following recommendations on physical activity for health are taken from the World Health Organisation publication "Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health".



Babies and children under 5 years

Daily physical activity is important for healthy growth and development in babies and toddlers.

Babies should be facilitated to move their head and bodies, reach, pull and push in a safe and supervised space.

Engaging in floor play and tummy time with a baby will help ensure their physical activity needs are met.

Toddlers should be physically active for at least 3 hours every day. Active time should include light activity such as standing, rolling and walking, as well as energetic activity such as running, jumping and hopping.

Facilitate toddler's physical activity by encouraging them to cycle, dance, skip and play ball games.



Did you know?

Approximately 3.2 million deaths each year are attributable to insufficient physical activity.

The talk test is an effective way to measure physical activity intensity. In general, while engaging in moderate intensity activity individuals should be able to talk, but not sing. During vigorous intensity activity, individuals should not be able to talk without pausing for a breath.



Did you know?

Physical inactivity is estimated to be the main cause for approximately 21–25% of breast and colon cancers.



5 to 18 years old

It is recommended that young people aged 5 to 18 years accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity daily physical activity. They should engage in aerobic activity every day, and more vigorous muscle and bone strengthening activities three times per week. Exceeding 60 minutes of physical activity per day provides additional health benefits.

Physically active young people are more likely to adopt healthy behaviours such as avoiding tobacco and alcohol, and reap psychological benefits such as improving their control over symptoms of anxiety and depression. They also benefit from improved social development.



19 to 64 years old

It is recommended that adults aged 18 to 64 should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week, or do at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week, or an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous intensity activity. Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes duration.

For additional health benefits, adults should increase their moderate intensity aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes per week, or engage in 150 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity per week, or an equivalent combination of both. A good rule is that one minute of vigorous activity provides the same health benefits as two minutes of moderate activity.

Muscle-strengthening activities should be done on 2 or more days a week.



65+ years old

Older adults should do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week or do at least 75 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week or an equivalent combination of both.

Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes duration.

For additional health benefits, older adults should increase their moderate intensity aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes per week, or engage in 150 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity per week, or an equivalent combination of both.

Older adults, with poor mobility, should perform physical activity to enhance balance and prevent falls on 3 or more days per week.

Muscle strengthening activities, involving major muscle groups, should be done on 2 or more days a week.

When older adults cannot do the recommended amounts of physical activity due to health conditions, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow.



Did you know?

It is estimated that only one in three adults receive the recommended amount of physical activity each week.

Sedentary lifestyles

Globally it is estimated that 23% of adults aged 18 and above are physically inactive, due to insufficient participation in physical activity during leisure time and an increase in sedentary behaviour during occupational and domestic activities.

A person with a sedentary lifestyle spends a lot of time sitting or lying, while using their mobile phone or computer, working at their desk, reading, commuting, watching television and playing computer consoles games. Sedentary lifestyles can contribute to many preventable chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes, as well as weight gain and obesity.

In conjunction with trying to increase activity levels, it is crucial that individuals reduce the amount of time they spend sitting.



Did you know?

Muscle tissue is approximately three times more efficient at burning calories than fat.

MAKING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PART OF DAILY LIFE

For most people, the easiest way to increase physical activity is to consciously incorporate it into everyday life, the more you do, the better. Taking part in sports and exercising regularly will result in even greater health benefits.

People are more likely to find time to be active if they plan ahead, set a time for physical activity and stick to their plan. For one week, keep a record of how you spend your time each day, and identify where you and your family could spend some time getting active.

It is often easier to find the motivation to get more active if friends or family get on board too. Try to exercise with friends or family who are at a similar fitness level to you.

Some practical tips:

Try cycling, jogging or walking part of the journey to work	Set aside 20 minutes every evening for a brisk walk after dinner	Schedule a physical activity every weekend – a long walk, family cycle or hike
Park the car further away from the office or shops and walk the rest of the way	Get off the bus or train one stop before your destination stop	Always take the stairs or walk up the escalator
Stand up when on the phone	Exercise while watching television	While on business trips make use of the hotel gym and swimming facilities
Get active at lunchtime – try walking or jogging with a colleague	If feasible, walk children to and from school for part of the school week	Try walking up and down the field or around the court while watching your children play sports
Schedule one weekly trip to the swimming pool	Sign up with an exercise class, walking group or cycling club	



Did you know?

Physical inactivity is estimated to be a main cause for approximately 27% of diabetes cases.

There are many health benefits to being active for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities, but you should consult your doctor before starting any new vigorous activity. If you haven't been active in a while, start slowly and gradually build up your intensity levels.

Do what you can and choose this month begin your journey towards increased physical activity and improved health and wellbeing.