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Physical Activity and your Heart Health

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EXERCISE CAN BENEFIT YOUR HEART BODY AND MIND



You and your family doing regular physical activity is one of the best things you can do for your heart health.



Increasing your physical activity from as little as 10 minutes a day to the recommended 30 to 45 minutes a day, five or more days of the week can help reduce your risk of heart disease and heart attacks. It can also prevent and manage many conditions and diseases, including various types of cancers, type 2 diabetes and depression.

Key takeaways

- Being physically active includes everyday movements (e.g., walking) and exercise.
- Regular physical activity has many benefits for your health, both now and in the future.
- Simply doing activities you enjoy is a great way to start on the path to better heart health.
- As little as 10 minutes of physical activity a day can be good for your health.

- You can increase your physical activity at any age and just about any level of fitness.

What exactly is 'physical activity'?

- **Physical activity** – daily actions, such as walking to the shops, taking the stairs, getting off public transport and walking to your destination.
- **Exercise** – organized activities and sports, such as swimming, cycling, yoga and walking groups.
(e.g., Heart Foundation Walking Program)

You can increase your daily physical activity without joining a gym or even breaking a sweat. The good news is you can simply do more of the activities you enjoy every day, like walking.

Why is physical activity and exercise good for your heart?

Building up your physical activity to the recommended level has many benefits. By making your heart work a little harder, you can cut your risk of heart disease by a third – regardless of your age, gender, income or where you live.

[Learn more about the benefits of physical activity](#)

How does physical activity help your body?

- ◊ **Physical activity is good medicine.** It can help reduce heart disease risk factors, similarly to high cholesterol and high blood pressure. If you have heart disease, physical activity can help you manage the condition.
- ◊ **Increased activity can help you manage your weight, which also has many benefits including lowering your risk of type 2 diabetes and some forms of cancer.** Being a healthy weight also reduces the risk factor for heart disease.
- ◊ **Regular exercise can help your bones and muscles become stronger.**

How does physical activity help your mind?

- ◊ **Immediate results** – if you take a short, brisk walk you may feel more refreshed and relaxed. You may also find this benefit will help motivate you to walk more often and for longer.
- ◊ **Improved wellbeing** – being active can help ease anxiety and depression, especially when done in natural environments like parks and gardens. You may find yourself feeling happier, more confident, and sleeping better.
- ◊ **More opportunities to socialize** – being physically active is a great way to connect with others and to build a sense of community. As you participate in more activities and exercise you might find yourself socializing more often with friends and family or perhaps joining an exercise class or sports team.

How much physical activity do you need?

Our busy, often sedentary lifestyle can make it hard to do the recommended amount of physical activity. But it's good to know you are never too old or too young to move more.

The diagrams on the next page illustrate just how much activity is advised for better health based on your age group.

- ◊ **Moderate-intensity exercise** – activities that make your heart beat faster but don't make you breathless.
- ◊ **Vigorous-intensity exercise** – high-intensity activities that make your heart rate higher and breathe more heavily.

How do you get started your?

- ◊ **Start small** – begin by blocking out some time in your day, even if it is just for a short stroll. You can then build up gradually. Remember that every step counts.

- ◊ **Set realistic goals and be kind to yourself** – if you are new to exercise, don't be hard on yourself. Try to create a plan, starting with 10 minutes a day. Slowly building up may help you feel motivated to continue.
- ◊ **Get more active in your neighborhood** – go for a walk around your suburb and you'll probably see lots of places and opportunities to be more active. You could also take public transport instead of driving your car.
- ◊ **Mix up your activities** – keep activities enjoyable, add some variety or try something new like tai chi or a dance class. You can also build activity into your social outings, such as going for a walk with a friend.
- ◊ **Be prepared** – make sure you dress for the weather and be sun smart. You can wear an activity tracker like a Fitbit to monitor progress and help you stay motivated.
- ◊ **Make sure you're safe** – know your limits and make sure you don't overdo high-intensity activity. Stick to well-lit public areas in the early morning or take a friend at night. Be aware of your surroundings by keeping your headphone volume to a minimum.
- ◊ **Get active with friends and family** – begin by blocking out some time in your day, even if it is just for a short stroll. You can then build up gradually. Remember that every step you take counts.
- ◊ **Join a community group** – join one of the many groups or contact your healthcare provider to find out about free or low-cost activities.

Take care of yourself

Being active over your lifetime is a great way to improve your health and happiness. While light to moderate physical activity is fine for most people, if you feel symptoms of discomfort, stop the immediately and seek medical advice.





Babies to 5 years

- Replace time sitting with more energetic play
- Encourage floor based play for children under 1, including at least 30min tummy time for infants
- Children over 2 years should do a variety of physical activities for 180 mins (3 hours) across the day
- Not being restrained for more than one hour (stroller or car seat)
- Screen time not advised for children under 2 years. Limit time to no more than 1 hour for children aged 3-5. Less is better.
- Good quality sleep including naps.
- Sleep duration for babies should be at 0-3 months, 14 to 17 hours; at 4-11 months, 12 - 16 hours.
- Sleep duration for 1 - 5 years should include naps and consistent sleep and wake times. For toddlers ages 1-2 years 11 to 14 hours; for preschoolers 10-13 hours.



5 to 17 years

- Children need at least 60 minutes of moderate* to vigorous** physical activity each day.
- You can gain greater benefits if you are active more than 60 minutes a day.
- Break up long periods of sitting.
- Limit recreational screen time to less than 2 hours a day.
- An uninterrupted 9 to 11 hours of sleep per night for those aged 5-13 years and 8 to 10 hours per night for those aged 14-17 years.
- Add activities that are vigorous, as well as those that strengthen muscles and bones at least 3 days per week.



18 to 64 years

- Be active on most, preferably five or more, days of the week.
- Aim to achieve 2.5-5 hours of moderate* intensity or 1.25-2.5 hours of vigorous** intensity physical activity each week.
- Aim to do muscle-strengthening activities at least 2 days each week.
- To get heart and lung health benefits, you should perform all activity in bouts of at least 10 minutes duration.
- Break up long periods of sitting.



65 years & older

- Older people should try to accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate* intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.
- Those who have stopped physical activity, or are new to starting, should seek advice from their doctor and then start at a level that's easy to gradually build up.
- Incorporate balance and flexibility exercises most days of the week
- Complete specific strength exercises 2 to 3 days per week
- Break up long periods of sitting.



*Moderate intensity - activities that make your heart beat faster but don't make you breathless. ** Vigorous intensity - activities that make you huff and puff

Physical activity ideas



Walking



Swimming



Yoga



Skipping



Cycling



Martial Arts



Symptoms of discomfort may include:

- Chest pain
- Feeling faint
- Difficulty breathing
- Your heart beats irregularly or too fast

Types of physical activity

Nine out of 10 people could reduce the risk of heart disease by walking as little as fifteen minutes more each day.

Key takeaways

- Cardio and strengthening activities are vital for good health.
- Mixing up a range of physical activities makes you more likely to keep it up over the long term.
- Physical activity can reduce your risk of heart disease.
- Depending on your own fitness, your activities can be at a low, moderate or vigorous-intensity.

As an adult, you can significantly reduce your risk of heart disease and heart attack by adding up to 30 minutes or more of brisk walking on five or more days a week.



'Action is the foundational key to all success.'

– Pablo Picasso

What activities should you do?

Being more active helps you to feel, think and live better. To find the right physical activity for you, do what you enjoy, do a variety of activities and do them regularly.

But which activities are best for me? The answer is simple.

- ◆ **Do what you enjoy**
- ◆ **Do a variety of activities**
- ◆ **Do them regularly**

When we have a great time being active, we're more likely you are to stick to it. Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to be active, such as:

- ◆ **Take a walking meeting at work**
- ◆ **Play a game with friends in the park**
- ◆ **Go on a bushwalking holiday**
- ◆ **Join a dance class**
- ◆ **Go for a walk, walking is a great activity for most people as it is free, simple and can be done almost anywhere**

To stay motivated, try setting goals and noting any improvements. You can record progress using a fitness tracker like a Fitbit, mobile app, website or journal.

No matter where you are on your fitness journey, it's important to be kind to yourself. If you can, remind yourself that you're doing a great job and that every step is helping you be healthier.

What are the different types of physical activity?

■ Warming-up and stretching

It's a good idea to gently warm-up before starting physical activity. This helps prepare muscles for being active and prevent injuries. Stretching after activity, when muscles are warm, assist flexibility and ease any aches and pains. Activities that improve flexibility, such as stretches, yoga or Pilates can be great at any age.

■ Strengthening activities for muscles and bones

Weight-bearing activity is important for most everyone – especially as we age – as muscle mass and bone density decrease over time. For those with heart disease, it can be safe and beneficial to complete strengthening activities. You should speak to your doctor, cardiac rehabilitation or health care team before starting any exercise using weights.

Bone strengthening involves moderate and high-impact activities to stimulate bone growth and repair. Some examples include tennis, jogging, and dancing, gardening and housework.

■ Lift light weights

- ◆ **Improve muscle strength by lifting light weights. If you don't have access to weights, use cans of tinned food, water bottles or small bags of rice.**

- ◆ **You can also do body weight resistance exercises, such as lunges, squats and push-ups.**

Start slowly and build up gradually

- ◆ **As with any new physical activity, start slowly and gradually build up. With muscle strengthening, start with 10 repetitions lifting an easy weight. Then, slowly over time, increase the repetitions gradually to 20. Once this feels easy, increase the weight slightly and return to 10 repetitions.**

■ Lift light weights

- ◆ **Don't hold your breath during lifts. It's important to breathe normally as the strain of lifting weights can raise blood pressure. This is also true for other lifting activities such as carrying heavy shopping or a basket of wet laundry.**

■ Cardiovascular or aerobic activity

Cardiovascular activity (cardio) can increase your breathing rate, making heart and muscles work harder. It can be low, moderate or vigorous intensity, which is different for every person.

Moderate-intensity activities make breathing heavier, but holding a conversation still comfortable. Some of these include:

- ◆ **Brisk walking**
- ◆ **Golf**
- ◆ **Easy cycling**
- ◆ **Household jobs, such as washing windows**

Vigorous-intensity activities make us huff and puff so we can't talk as easily. Examples include:

- ◆ **Jogging**
- ◆ **Group fitness classes**
- ◆ **Organized sports, such as football, tennis and netball**



High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) involves short bursts of vigorous exercise paired with rest or low-intensity activity.

How intense should physical activities be?

- Start with moderate-intensity physical activities that make you breathe a little heavier. Then, increase the amount and frequency gradually.
- Speak to your doctor or health professional for advice before starting a new physical activity routine.

- Don't overdo it. If you're feeling discomfort, chest pain, faint, trouble breathing or your heartbeat is too fast or irregular, stop the physical activity immediately and seek medical advice.
- Avoid high-intensity physical activity right after meals or alcohol, or if you have an illness.

Speak to your doctor before you start

Light to moderate activity is fine for most people. However, if you have pre-existing health issues, speak to your doctor before starting any new physical activity.

