

Physical activity - men

There is an increasing focus on the benefits of physical activity and encouraging the Australian community to become more physically active. Physical activity is important for both physical and mental health. Lack of physical activity is linked to a range of serious health problems including obesity, heart disease and some forms of cancer.

The most common reasons given by men not being physically active are insufficient time because of work or study commitments, lack of interest, age ('too old') and ongoing injuries or illness.

Any physical activity is better than no physical activity! The general recommendation is that you should aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days. This is the same for women and men (according to 'National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians').

If you have a medical condition, are overweight, are over 40 years of age or haven't exercised regularly for a long time, see your doctor for a check-up, advice and support before increasing your physical activity levels.

Barriers to physical activity

Some of the more common reasons why some men don't exercise include:

- **Lack of time** – men aged between 30 and 50 are typically busy with work and family commitments. When leisure time is limited, it's natural to choose enjoyable activities – if men don't view physical activity as enjoyable, they won't do it.
- **Lack of interest** – some men believe in the 'no pain, no gain' misconception, and think that only gruelling and uncomfortable forms of physical activity are worthwhile. However, physical activity doesn't have to be particularly vigorous. Any activity that works the major muscle groups, such as walking, gardening and even washing the car, is usually demanding enough to offer health benefits.
- **Lack of motivation** – some men view health as a low priority. Unfortunately, the motivation to become more active may only come from a health scare.
- **Lack of physical ability** – health issues that make activity and movement uncomfortable such as obesity, back pain or persistent fatigue are a common barrier to regular participation in physical activity.
- **Limited access to physical activity options** – gym fees, sport club memberships and some types of exercise equipment can be expensive. The local neighbourhood may have limited recreational venues, such as parks. In other cases, outdoor exercise is avoided because the neighbourhood isn't considered safe.
- **Weather** – extremes of hot and cold weather can sap the motivation to undertake physical activity outdoors.

How to overcome the exercise barriers

Suggestions include:

- **Lack of time** – 30 minutes of exercise per day is the recommended minimum. For busy men, finding a spare half-hour can be tricky. Research suggests that you can break up your 30 minutes of exercise into two 15-minute blocks, or even three 10-minute blocks, as long as the total energy used is about the same. Incorporate physical activity into family time – for example, you could throw a frisbee in the park or take your kids to the local swimming pool. Walk for 10 minutes during your lunch break. Some workplaces offer exercise equipment or physical activity programs during lunch breaks. If you have been inactive for a long time, you can start by increasing your 'incidental' physical activity (see below).
- **Lack of interest** – physical activity doesn't have to be difficult. Forget about the 'no pain, no gain' myth and explore activities that seem fun and appealing.

- **Lack of motivation** – join a physical activity group or find an exercise buddy. You're less inclined to skip a session if to do so would mean letting down a friend or family member. If you can't find a buddy and find the activity boring, choose an alternative like riding a stationary bike so you can watch television or read a book at the same time. You can give your physical activity a purpose, for example, it can be a way to get somewhere, or an errand like walking to get the newspaper.
- **Lack of physical ability** – find an activity that doesn't make you feel uncomfortable. For example, swimming and other forms of water activity are an excellent option if your mobility is limited. Consult with your doctor for further suggestions. If fatigue is a problem, consider the fact that regular physical activity actually boosts energy levels.
- **Limited access to physical activity options** – choose activities that don't require facilities or equipment, such as walking. If you feel unsafe walking alone through your neighbourhood, join a walking group. Contact your local council for further options or to express concerns about barriers to regular activity in your area.
- **Weather** – choose indoor activities, such as cycling on a stationary bike or performing aerobics videos. Explore activities that depend on specific weather conditions, for example, swimming in summer or skiing in winter.

Making the changes

You are more likely to incorporate physical activity into your day if you plan ahead. Suggestions include:

- Think about the factors that discourage you from being active.
- Learn more about the benefits of physical activity and the multitude of options available. The Better Health Channel has lots of information on these topics.
- Decide which types of physical activity appeal to you.
- Look through your diary and identify possible timeslots for physical activity but also try to reduce the amount of time you are inactive throughout the day.
- Set reasonable goals for yourself. Decide how you are going to monitor your progress.
- See your doctor for a check-up, advice, support and referral.
- Update your physical activity goals on a regular basis and document the benefits to your quality of life.

Incidental exercise

You can incorporate physical activity into your daily lifestyle by making a few small changes, such as:

- Walk or cycle to the local shops instead of taking the car.
- Get off the bus (or train) at an earlier stop and walk the rest of the way.
- Wash your car yourself.
- Take the stairs instead of the lift.
- Don't forget that having sex is a form of exercise too.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Kinect Australia Tel. (03) 8320-0100
- Local council

Things to remember

- Physical activity is not just structured exercise and it doesn't have to be gruelling. Any activity that works the major muscle groups, such as walking, gardening and even washing the car, is usually demanding enough to offer health benefits.
- You are more likely to maintain adequate levels of physical activity if you plan ahead.
- If you have a medical condition, are overweight, are over 40 years of age, have been inactive for a long time, or just don't know where to start, consult your doctor for a check-up and to discuss your options before increasing your level of physical activity.

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Physical Activity Australia

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