

Physical activity - it's important

The many benefits of exercise and physical activity are now well documented. Regular physical activity has the ability to reduce the risk of several major chronic diseases, as well as promote quality of life and a sense of wellbeing.

It only takes 30 minutes a day to enjoy these benefits.

Benefits of regular physical activity

If you are regularly physically active, you tend to:

- Reduce your risk of a heart attack
- Manage your weight better
- Have a lower blood cholesterol level
- Lower the risk of type 2 diabetes and some cancers
- Have lower blood pressure
- Have stronger bones, muscles and joints and lower the risk of osteoporosis
- Recover better from a heart attack
- Feel better – more energy, happy and relaxed, and sleep better.

A healthier state of mind

A number of studies have found that exercise helps depression. There are many views as to how exercise helps people with depression. Exercise may block negative thoughts or distract people from daily worries. Exercising with others, provides an opportunity for increased social contact. Increased fitness may lift mood and improve sleep patterns. Exercise may also change levels of chemicals in the brain, such as serotonin, endorphins and stress hormones.

Aim for at least 30 minutes a day

To maintain health and reduce risk of health problems, health professionals and researchers recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days. This is one of the *National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults*.

These national *Guidelines* recommend the minimum amount of physical activity you need to do to enhance your health. The four guidelines are:

1. Think of movement as an opportunity, not an inconvenience. Any form of movement is an opportunity to improve your health.
2. Be active every day in as many ways as you can. Make a habit of walking or cycling instead of using the car.
3. Put together at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days.
4. If you can, also enjoy some regular, vigorous exercise for extra health and fitness. Vigorous exercise makes you 'huff and puff' such as jogging, aerobics and netball.

You can accumulate your 30 minutes throughout the day by combining shorter bouts of at least 10 minutes. Remember, something is better than nothing, but more is better than something.

Ways to increase activity

Increases in daily activity can come from small changes made throughout your day, such as walking or cycling instead of using the car, getting off a tram, train or bus a stop earlier and walking the rest of the way, or walking the children to school.

See your doctor first

It is a good idea to see your doctor before starting your physical activity program if:

- You are aged over 40 years
- Physical activity causes pain in your chest
- You often faint or have spells of severe dizziness
- Moderate physical activity makes you very breathless
- You are at a higher risk of heart disease
- You think you might have heart disease or you have heart problems
- You are pregnant.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Exercise physiologist ESSA Exercise & Sports Science Australia
- Australian Physiotherapy Association Tel. 1300 306 622

Things to remember

- Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day.
- See everyday activities as a good opportunity to be active.
- Try to find the time for some regular, vigorous exercise for extra health and fitness benefits.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Physical Activity Australia

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