

---

## The amount of physical activity you need

---

### Summary

- Physical activity is good for everyone, regardless of your age and fitness level.
  - The amount of physical activity you need varies, depending on your age.
  - Physical activity can be anything you enjoy that gets your body moving, makes your breathing quicker, and your heart beat faster.
  - There are lots of ways you can squeeze more activity into your day, like walking the kids to school, taking the stairs at work, or getting out into the garden.
- 

We all need to eat healthy foods and to include some exercise in our day to keep our bodies working properly. There's **lots of information about what to eat**. But do you know how much exercise you need?

It's important for your health that you get enough physical activity every day, and that you limit your sedentary behaviour. But getting the amount of physical activity you need doesn't have to be hard or unpleasant.

The **guidelines** discussed in this article will show you how much physical activity you need at every stage of your life.

Physical activity can be anything that gets your body moving, makes your breathing quicker, and your heart beat faster. You can vary the intensity of your physical activity, and spread it throughout your day.

A sedentary lifestyle is one that includes little or no physical activity and where you spend most of the time sitting or lying down. Too many sedentary activities such as watching television, playing video games or sitting at a desk can be bad for your health.

Sometimes you may need to sit to work at your computer, do school work, read or travel, but it's important to find a balance that includes an appropriate energy intake and physical activity output.

### How much physical activity you need to stay healthy

**Australia's physical activity guidelines** are based on a rigorous evidence review process that considers the links between physical activity and health outcome indicators (including the risk of chronic disease and obesity), and the links between sedentary behaviour and the health outcome indicators.

The guidelines recommend the amount and intensity of activity by age. As a rough guide:

- Vigorous exercise means you can't talk and exercise at the same time.
- Moderate exercise means you can talk while you're exercising, but you can't sing.

### Children 0–5 years

It's important for infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers to be active every day. It encourages healthy growth and development.

These guidelines are for all girls and boys aged 0–5 years who have not yet started school, regardless of their cultural background or ability.

The guidelines recommend the following physical activity for babies and small children:

- You can encourage babies from birth to 1 year to play on the floor, in a safe and supervised environment. Tummy time gives babies opportunities to develop their muscles, as well as their fine and gross motor skills, as they move onto activities like reaching, rolling, sitting up and crawling.
-

- Toddlers (1–3 years) and pre-schoolers (3–5 years) need at least three hours of physical activity every day. Our fact sheet on **keeping children active** has ideas for keeping children of all ages active. You can spread this activity throughout their entire day to break it up.
- It's recommended that children younger than 2 years do not watch any television or use any electronic media (such as DVDs, computers or other electronic devices).
- It's recommended children 2–5 years watch less than an hour of television or other electronic media each day.

### **Children 5–12 years**

Being physically active doesn't only mean a healthy body for children; it's also an opportunity to make new friends and develop their social skills.

The guidelines recommend the following physical activity for children:

- Children 5–12 years need at least one hour of moderate to vigorous exercise every day. Include a variety of aerobic activities such as walking, running, jumping, skipping or cycling, and make some of it vigorous.
- Strengthening activities are important too. Children of this age should participate in strengthening activities at least three days every week. These include body weight activities such as climbing, swinging, jumping and skipping. Play grounds are excellent for these strength activities.
- These guidelines are a minimum. Children who do more physical activity will enjoy more health benefits.
- It's recommended children 5–12 years keep their television and electronic media time to less than two hours each day. It's a good idea to break this time up to avoid sitting for a long time, and there are fewer health risks if they watch less than two hours each day.

### **Young people 13–17 years**

Young people in their teens go through a lot of life changes. They are moving through school and becoming independent. Some are even finding a job.

It can be a challenging time to try to keep physically active with so much going on, but it is possible and important to maintain good health.

The guidelines recommend the following physical activity for young people:

- Young people aged 13–17 years need at least one hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. Include a variety of aerobic activities, and some vigorous activity.
- Strengthening exercise is important too. Young people need to do strengthening activities at least three days every week.
- These guidelines are a minimum. Young people who do more physical activity will enjoy more health benefits.
- It's recommended young people keep their television and electronic media time to less than two hours each day. It's a good idea to break this time up to avoid sitting for a long time, and there are fewer health risks if they watch less than two hours each day.

### **Adults 18–64 years**

As an adult, your health and wellbeing depend on you being physically active and limiting your sedentary behaviour. It's so easy to put exercise at the bottom of a long to-do list, but you can plan physical activity in short bursts that fit around your life.

The guidelines recommend the following physical activity for adults:

- Doing any physical activity is better than doing nothing. If you don't currently do any exercise, start with a small amount of exercise and build it up gradually to the recommended amount. And remember, you can spread your exercise throughout the day. All the exercise you do counts.
- Be active on most days of the week. If you can be active every single day, that is even better.
- Try to accumulate 150–300 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity, or 75–150 minutes of vigorous intensity physical activity every week. Or you can do an equivalent combination of the two levels of activity.
- Try to do muscle strengthening activity on at least two days each week.
- Try to minimise the amount of time you spend sitting down, and try not to sit for long periods at a time.

If you are new to exercise or are coming back from a **long period of inactivity**, pre-exercise screening and talking to your health professional will help make sure that your exercise program is effective and brings benefits, not injury or pain.

Seeking advice from an exercise physiologist can help make sure that the physical activity you do is right for you.

### **Older people 65 years and above**

Being physically active and staying fit and healthy will help you to get the most out of life, whatever your age. Aim for 30 minutes or more of physical activity every day.

If you're not getting enough activity in your life right now, don't worry. You can start by adding small amounts and building slowly. Better Health Channel has plenty of advice about **getting started with physical activity**.

Even the smallest increase in your physical activity can make a big difference to your health and wellbeing.

The guidelines recommend the following physical activity for older people:

- Some physical activity is recommended, no matter what an older person's age, weight, health problems or abilities. There is an activity to suit everyone.
- Try to do a range of activities that incorporate different ways to build your fitness, strength, balance and flexibility.
- If you have previously stopped physical activity, or if you're starting a new activity you haven't done before, start at a level that you can easily manage. You can build up to the recommended amount as your fitness and confidence grows.

### **Moderate intensity activities**

You can start out with some moderate intensity activities that don't require too much effort. You should still be able to talk while you're doing the majority of these activities.

Moderate intensity activities include:

- brisk walking
- recreational swimming
- dancing
- social tennis
- riding a bike or a scooter
- golf
- household tasks such as cleaning windows or raking leaves
- playing active games.

### **Vigorous intensity activities**

When you're doing vigorous activities, you should be breathing harder and faster (or huffing and puffing) to get the amount of physical activity you need.

Vigorous intensity activities include:

- running
- fast cycling
- organised sports such as football, soccer or netball
- tasks that involve lifting, carrying or digging.

### **Strengthening activities**

Strengthening activities may be moderate or vigorous intensity, but they also help build muscle and make you stronger.

Strengthening activities for children include:

- skipping

- hopping
- jumping
- climbing
- swinging
- playing games such as tug-o-war and hopscotch
- dancing
- gymnastics
- martial arts.

Strengthening activities for young people and adults can include any of the children's activities, and:

- sit ups
- push ups
- lunges
- squats
- resistance/ strength training exercises supervised and instructed by qualified professionals.

### **How to incorporate physical activity into your day**

There are lots of ways you can **squeeze more activity into your day**. Here are some ideas, depending on where you are.

#### **At home:**

- work in the yard; mow the lawn, rake the leaves, prune the bushes or dig in the garden
- when you're out for a walk, pick up your pace and choose a hilly route if you can
- walk your dog regularly
- park further away when you go shopping to add some more walking to your day
- do abdominal exercise while you watch television
- walk the kids to school
- wash the car by hand.

#### **At work:**

- stand up when you talk on the phone
- walk down the hall to talk to someone rather than calling or emailing
- take the stairs instead of the lift, or get off a few floors early and walk the rest of the way
- schedule exercise time in your work calendar and treat it like another meeting
- walk around the grounds or streets near your building during your break or lunchtime
- get a standing desk.

#### **At play:**

- plan family outings that include physical activity, such as hiking or swimming
- meet up with a friend and do some active recreation you both enjoy
- when you're at the beach, go for a walk or fly a kite
- when you're playing golf, walk instead of getting a golf cart.

#### **Remember...**

- The amount of physical activity you need varies, depending on your age. But, physical activity is good for everyone, regardless of your age and fitness level.
- Physical activity can be anything you enjoy that gets your body moving, makes your breathing quicker, and your heart beat faster.
- There are lots of ways you can squeeze more activity into your day, like walking the kids to school, taking the

stairs at work, or getting out into the garden.

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

Better Health Channel

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

**Copyright © 1999/2019** State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.