
Physical activity for men

Summary

- 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.
 - Any physical activity is better than no physical activity – you should aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days.
 - 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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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 ('I'm 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, as well as avoiding long periods of sitting. This is the same for women and men (according to Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines).

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.

Pre-exercise screening is used to identify people with medical conditions that may put them at a higher risk of experiencing a health problem during physical activity. It is a filter or 'safety net' to help decide if the potential benefits of exercise outweigh the risks for you. Ensure you read through the [**pre-exercise self-screening tool**](#) before you embark on a physical activity or exercise program,

Perceived barriers to physical activity and how to overcome them

There are several common reasons why some men don't exercise:

Lack of time for physical activity

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.

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 in physical activity

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.

Forget about the 'no pain, no gain' myth and explore activities that seem fun and appealing.

Lack of motivation about physical activity

Some men view health as a low priority. Unfortunately, the motivation to become more active may only come from a health scare. Try exercising with a friend or join a physical activity group. You're less inclined to skip a session if to do so would mean letting someone down.

If you can't find a buddy or find the activity boring, choose an alternative such as riding a stationary bike so you can watch television or read a book at the same time. Or, you can give your physical activity a purpose – for example, it can be a way to get somewhere or complete an errand such as walking to get the newspaper.

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. 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 exercise facilities

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.

Wrong weather conditions for physical activity

To overcome extreme hot, cold or windy weather, choose indoor activities, such as cycling on a stationary bike or using an aerobics video. Think about what weather conditions you enjoy exercising in, and explore activities that depend on those specific conditions, for example, swimming in summer or skiing in winter.

Plan physical activity into your day

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.
- Update your physical activity goals on a regular basis and document the benefits to your quality of life.
- See your doctor for a check-up, advice, support and referral.

Incidental physical activity

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 instead of taking it to the carwash.
- Take the stairs instead of the lift.
- Don't forget that having sex is a form of exercise too.

Where to get help

betterhealth.vic.gov.au

- Your doctor
- Physical Activity Australia Tel. **(03) 8320 0100**
- Local council

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