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## Physical activity - it's important

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### Summary

- 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.
  - Minimise the amount of time spent in prolonged sitting and break up long periods of sitting as often as possible.
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Physical activity or exercise can improve your health and reduce the risk of developing several diseases like type 2 diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease. Physical activity and exercise can have immediate and long-term health benefits. Most importantly, regular activity can improve your quality of life. A minimum of 30 minutes a day can allow you to enjoy these benefits.

### Benefits of regular physical activity

If you are regularly physically active, you may:

- 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 risk of developing osteoporosis
- lower your risk of falls
- recover better from periods of hospitalisation or bed rest
- feel better – with more energy, a better mood, feel more 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 you from daily worries.
- Exercising with others provides an opportunity for increased social contact.
- Increased fitness may lift your mood and improve your sleep patterns.
- Exercise may also change levels of chemicals in your brain, such as serotonin, endorphins and stress hormones.

### Aim for at least 30 minutes a day

To maintain health and reduce your risk of health problems, health professionals and researchers recommend a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days.

### Physical activity guidelines

**Australia's physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines** state that:

- Doing any physical activity is better than doing none. If you currently do no physical activity, start by doing some, and gradually build up to the recommended amount.
  - Be active on most, preferably all, days every week.
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- Accumulate 150 to 300 minutes (2 ½ to 5 hours) of moderate intensity physical activity or 75 to 150 minutes (1 ¼ to 2 ½ hours) of vigorous intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both moderate and vigorous activities, each week.
- Do muscle strengthening activities on at least two days each week.

### **Ways to increase physical 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 45 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.

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.

Print a copy of the [\*\*adult pre-exercise screening tool\*\*](#) (pdf) and discuss it with your doctor, allied health or exercise professional.

### **Where to get help**

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Registered exercise professional
- **Fitness Australia** Tel. **1300 211 311**
- Exercise physiologist
- Physiotherapist

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