Physical activity - it's important
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.

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.
- 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

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Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off the couch and enjoy getting fit by following these few simple steps.

1. Embrace your inner child

What types of activities did you enjoy when you were a kid? Did you participate in an organised team sport or do something less structured? Give them a try again. Take time out to discover what suits your physical, emotional and social needs.
3. **Find an exercise buddy**

Let’s face it, we’re more likely to stick to physical activity if we do it with friends or family. It’s a great way to catch up and a great motivator.

4. **Explore the local community**

Join a club or community group – it’s a great way to meet new people who may even become lifelong friends. You’ll be surprised how many opportunities are out there – from leisure centres and sports clubs to parks, trails, swimming pools and classes. Local councils and libraries can help you track them down.
5. **Be kind to yourself**

Make sure you have a medical check up before starting any form of physical activity, especially if you’re over 40, overweight, haven’t exercised for a long time or have a chronic illness. Fill out this pre-exercise self-screening tool for adults.

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6. **Start small**

Increase your activity time and intensity gradually. Take extra care if you are new to exercise or haven’t exercised for a while. Start out gently and build your endurance little by little – this way you’ll avoid overdoing it or injuring yourself! It’s a good idea to start with 10 minutes each day at first and then eventually work your way up to 30 minutes or more.
Mix it up

Not only does a range of activities keep your interest up, they challenge different muscles. If you’re time and budget poor, be creative and look for other alternatives. Walk or cycle to work, take the stairs or leave the car at home when running errands. Buy some exercise equipment for home, such as online exercise videos or DVDs. A stationary bike is fun to ride while watching TV.

Up for a challenge?

Keep up your interest by trying new activities. You may like to join others and sign up to a local fitness event, such as a fun run that raises money for a good cause. You’ll not only be helping yourself, but others in the process.

Try a mantra

Replace ‘no pain no gain’ with ‘no fun no future’. If you are not enjoying yourself, you won’t be able to sustain it.
10. **Be realistic**

Set a mixture of short and long-term goals that are achievable and you can measure. When you first begin, mark dates and times in your diary for exercise sessions. Review your progress regularly and focus on what you have achieved.

11. **Don't beat yourself up**

If you miss a session that’s okay, even elite athletes need downtime after participating in rigorous activities. If you’re not in the mood, it’s important to focus on how exercise makes you feel – it not only relieves stress but helps fight sadness and depression!
Keep a training diary or journal

Take time to recognise these little improvements to your daily quality of life – it can increase your motivation. Reflect on how you feel before, during and after exercise. It’s a great way to track your progress.

Reward yourself

Give yourself a reward each time you reach a fitness goal. It gives you the incentive to keep going. Treat yourself to something you enjoy, but make sure your rewards match your healthy lifestyle. As you make progress, you may find you end up rewarding yourself with something physical, such as a walk by the beach or river after a hard day’s work!

References

- Australia’s physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines, Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government.

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Keeping active

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Keeping active basics
- Getting started
- Staying fit and motivated
- Exercise safety and injury prevention
- Healthy eating and exercise
- Keeping active throughout life
- Health conditions and exercise

Keeping active basics

- Balancing energy in and energy out
A kilojoule is a unit of measure of energy, in the same way that kilometres measure distance...

- **Body mass index (BMI)**
  Body mass index or BMI is an approximate measure of your total body fat...

- **Energy in food (kilojoules and calories)**
  A kilojoule is a unit of measure of energy, in the same way that kilometres measure distance...

- **Exercise intensity**
  If you can talk but not sing, you’re exercising at the right intensity...

- **Exercise in your local surroundings (video)**
  Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Bilsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings - whether it's running up...

- **Exercise - the low-down on hydration**
  You need to drink enough and regularly to keep hydrated during exercise...

- **Exercise with a friend**
  Exercise is important for your physical and mental health. Working out with a friend means you’re more likely to have fun and stick to your exercise plan...

- **Fitness centres – how to choose one**
  Do some research before signing up at a fitness centre...

- **How to make exercise fun (slide show)**
  Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off...

- **Kids and energy needs**
  It’s important for kids to eat a wide variety of foods for a healthy, well-balanced diet and to be physically active. Creating healthy habits during childhood helps to ensure lifelong healthy...

- **Personal trainers – how to choose one**
  Make sure your personal trainer is properly qualified before entering into any agreement...

- **Physical activity for men**
  Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare...

- **Physical activity for seniors**
  Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease...

- **Physical activity for women**
  If you can’t make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family...

- **Physical activity - how to get active when you are busy**
  Even if you’re busy, you still need to find a way to be physically active...

- **Physical activity - it's important**
  Just 30 minutes of moderate activity each day can improve your health and reduce the risk of developing certain conditions or diseases...

- **Physical activity - what's your excuse?**
  There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day...

- **Resistance training – health benefits**
  If you do resistance training repeatedly and consistently, your muscles become stronger...

- **Secrets to healthy ageing (slide show)**
  Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

- **Sports and physical activity**
  Around 62 per cent of Australians adults do not meet the recommended physical activity guidelines to gain the health benefits of increased fitness and reduced body fat...


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**Getting started**

- **Exercise programs**
  If you are unfamiliar with what is involved, starting an exercise program can be challenging...

- **Exercise - the low-down on hydration**
You need to drink enough and regularly to keep hydrated during exercise.

- **Exercise with a friend**
  Exercise is important for your physical and mental health. Working out with a friend means you’re more likely to have fun and stick to your exercise plan.

- **Gardening for children**
  Children can learn new skills, have fun and develop self-confidence when they grow their own plants.

- **Gardening for health - starting out**
  Gardening is a healthy activity that can be enjoyed by everyone.

- **Gardening for older people**
  Garden spaces and equipment can be modified or adapted to help older people enjoy gardening.

- **Gardening safety**
  Gardening is an enjoyable form of exercise, but you need to take care.

- **Getting active - tucker talk tips**
  The main thing is to choose physical activities that you enjoy and that you can stick to in the long term.

- **How to make exercise fun (slideshow)**
  Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off...

- **Physical activity - choosing a provider**
  Choosing the right fitness centre or service provider requires some research.

- **Physical activity - choosing the one for you**
  You are more likely to keep up a healthy lifestyle change if your chosen activity suits you.

- **Physical activity for men**
  Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare.

- **Physical activity for seniors**
  Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease.

- **Physical activity for women**
  If you can’t make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family.

- **Physical activity - how to get active when you are busy**
  Even if you’re busy, you still need to find a way to be physically active.

- **Physical activity - how to get started**
  If you’ve been inactive and want to begin physical activity, see a doctor first.

- **Physical activity - learn how to swim (video)**
  Swimming is a great low-impact exercise for all ages and abilities. Australian marathon swimmer, Tammy Van Wisse shows ex-AFL (Australian Football League) player and coach, Tony Shaw some swimming.

- **Physical activity - overcoming barriers (video)**
  Former world aerobics champion, Sue Stanley shows us how to overcome common exercise excuses.

- **Physical activity - overcoming the barriers**
  If you think physical activity is boring, try exercising with a friend.

- **Physical activity - staying motivated**
  Pick an exercise or fitness activity that appeals to you and suits your lifestyle.

- **Staying fit and motivated**
  **10 tips to plan your exercise**
  Physical activity won’t just happen. Most activities require planning – starting and maintaining a physical activity program does too. Here are some tips for getting ready to exercise. Make...

  **10 tips to stay active year round**
  Pick an activity you enjoy...

- **Exercise and mood**

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Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise... 

- **Exercise - everyday activities**
  
  There are lots of everyday activities that provide an opportunity to be active and provide health benefits.

- **Exercise in your local surroundings (video)**
  
  Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Billsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings - whether it's running up...

- **Exercise programs**
  
  If you are unfamiliar with what is involved, starting an exercise program can be challenging.

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  Exercise is important for your physical and mental health. Working out with a friend means you’re more likely to have fun and stick to your exercise plan.

- **How to make exercise fun (slideshow)**
  
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- **Pets can make you healthy (video)**
  
  Australians have one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world.

- **Physical activity - choosing the one for you**
  
  You are more likely to keep up a healthy lifestyle change if your chosen activity suits you.

- **Physical activity for men**
  
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  Former world aerobics champion, Sue Stanley shows us how to overcome common exercise excuses...

- **Physical activity - overcoming the barriers**
  
  If you think physical activity is boring, try exercising with a friend.

- **Physical activity - staying active during summer (video)**
  
  Physical Activity and Fitness Trainer Sherri Bourne gives us some great tips for staying active over the summer months.

- **Physical activity - staying motivated**
  
  Pick an exercise or fitness activity that appeals to you and suits your lifestyle.

- **Physical activity - what's your excuse?**
  
  There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day.

- **Stretching exercise in winter (video)**
  
  When starting out an exercise program, it's really important to do a warm up and cool down before and after exercise.

**Exercise safety and injury prevention**

- **10 tips for safe stretching**
  
  Make stretching part of your life... 10 tips for safe stretching...

- **10 tips to exercise safely**
  
  Exercising regularly has wide-ranging physical, emotional and social health benefits. You need to exercise safely to remain healthy and injury-free. If it’s safe and painless, you’re more...
Aerobics injuries are usually caused by trauma and overuse, but can be prevented by using the right techniques and equipment.

- Australian rules football - preventing injury
  Australian rules football is a physical contact sport that often results in injuries from tackling, kicking, running and constant competition for the ball.

- Basketball - health benefits
  Basketball is a sport enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.

- Basketball - preventing injury
  Basketball is a fast game with frequent and aggressive body contacts - injuries can and do occur.

- Canoeing and kayaking - health benefits
  Canoeing and kayaking can be done as a hobby, a competitive sport or as a fun activity on holidays.

- Canoeing and kayaking - preventing injury
  Careful preparation and the right equipment can help prevent canoeing and kayaking injuries.

- Cricket - health benefits
  To play cricket you need to be fit and strong and have good hand-eye coordination and ball-handling skills.

- Cricket - preventing injury
  Cricket is a very popular sport. Injuries are often caused by overuse, being struck by a cricket ball and falls.

- Cycling - health benefits
  Cycling can help to protect you from serious diseases.

- Cycling - preventing injury
  You are much more likely to hurt yourself by falling off your bike or hitting a stationary object than colliding with another vehicle.

- Dance - health benefits
  Dancing can be a fun way to stay fit for people of all ages and abilities.

- Dancing - preventing injury
  Dancing is fun and a great form of exercise, but make sure you avoid injuries.

- Dog walking - the health benefits
  If you are planning to buy a dog, make sure you choose a breed that's appropriate to your lifestyle.

- Exercise safety
  Training too hard or fast is a common cause of sports-related injuries.

- Fishing - preventing injury
  Never go fishing alone? always fish with someone else and, ideally, with two other people.

- Golf - health benefits
  Golf provides a stimulating challenge, combined with a healthy walk in pleasant surroundings.

- Golf - preventing injury
  The average golfer playing an 18-hole game walks about seven kilometres.

- Heat stress and exercise
  Heat stress occurs when sweat can't evaporate fast enough to keep the body sufficiently cool during physical activity.

Healthy eating and exercise

- Food for sport - tucker talk tips
  Carbohydrate is the most important nutrient for athletes.

- Secrets to healthy ageing (slideshow)
  Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

- Sporting performance and food
  Good nutrition and a healthy diet are essential to improving your sports performance.

- The amount of physical activity 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.
Keeping active throughout life

- 10 tips for active seniors
  Stay independent for longer with regular exercise...
- Children – keeping them active
  A young child is naturally active, so build upon their inclinations to use their body...
- Exercise and stretching in the office (video)
  Sitting behind a desk all day doesn't mean you can't exercise...
- Gardens for all – a health activity
  Gardening has many health and therapeutic benefits, and is an activity that most people can enjoy...
- Getting active - tucker talk tips
  The main thing is to choose physical activities that you enjoy and that you can stick to in the long term...
- Healthy active Koori kids - tucker talk tips
  Good nutrition and physical exercise help to keep Koori kids healthy and avoid diseases when they get older...
- Healthy ageing – stay involved
  Reach out to the world around you for fun, a sense of achievement, social contact and mental stimulation...
- Healthy and active ageing
  Being physically active, eating well, socialising and improving your health can help you live a healthy, happy and active life as you get older...
- How to make exercise fun (slideshow)
  Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off...
- How to volunteer and boost your health (slideshow)
  Volunteering is great for our health – it makes us feel good, while helping others in the process...
- Older people in hospital – Get well soon
  Learn about improving and maintaining your health during a hospital stay...
- Parent's guide for active girls
  Physical activity is an important part of health and wellbeing, and girls should remain active as they grow up...
- Physical activity for men
  Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare...
- Physical activity for seniors
  Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease...
- Physical activity for seniors – staying active during summer (video)
  Physical Activity and Fitness Trainer - Sherri Bourne shares a few easy and low-impact ways for seniors to stay healthy over the summer months...
- Physical activity for women
  If you can't make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family...
- Physical activity - what's your excuse?
  There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day...
- Postnatal exercise
  Always consult with your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal exercise program...
- Pregnancy and exercise
  Unless you have complications, you should be able to exercise throughout your pregnancy...
- Secrets to healthy ageing (slideshow)
  Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!
- Sport and children
  Make sure that some family outings offer opportunities for physical activity, such as playing sport together...
- The amount of physical activity 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...

- Vision loss and sport
  Many sports can be adapted to suit people who are blind or have low vision

- Walking for good health
  Walking will improve your fitness and reduce your risk of heart disease

- Walking - the benefits for older people
  Walking is great exercise for older people. It has a range of health and social benefits, and most people can do it

Health conditions and exercise

- Arthritis and exercise
  Exercise can reduce some of the symptoms of arthritis, and improve joint mobility and strength

- Asthma and exercise
  Exercise-induced asthma can be prevented with medication and by preparing for exercise and physical activity

- Breathing problems and exercise
  A little physical activity and some breathing exercises can help people with lung disease

- Cancer - exercise to help you cope
  People with cancer should be as physically active as their abilities and condition allow

- Dementia - reducing your risk
  Adopting a 'brain healthy' lifestyle may reduce your risk of dementia in later life

- Diabetes - issues for children and teenagers
  Many parents worry when their child with diabetes starts or returns to school

- Epilepsy and employment
  Many people living with epilepsy are successfully employed across a range of professional fields

- Epilepsy and exercise
  It is rare for a person with epilepsy to have a seizure during physical activity, but you should always take safety precautions when exercising

- Exercise and mood
  Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise

- Exercise in your local surroundings (video)
  Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Bilsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings - whether it's running up...

- HIV, hepatitis and sport
  People with HIV or hepatitis B or C participate in a wide range of sports without restrictions, and the risk of transmission to another player is extremely small

- Menstruation - athletic amenorrhoea
  Women who are athletes or who exercise a lot on a regular basis are at risk of developing athletic amenorrhoea, which is the absence of periods

- Osteoporosis and exercise
  Exercise can reduce the risk of fractures resulting from osteoporosis by both slowing the rate of bone loss, and reducing the person’s risk of falling by building muscle strength and improving balance

- Sports injuries
  A sports injury may be more severe than you think

- Type 2 diabetes - healthy eating and exercise (video)
  People with type 2 diabetes talk about positive lifestyle changes that improve their quality of life

Related Information

- Older people in hospital – Get well soon
  Learn about improving and maintaining your health during a hospital stay

- Physical activity for women
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- **Fitness centres – how to choose one**
  
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Related information on other websites

- A Healthy Active Australia
- beyondblue
- Bushwalk Victoria
- Department of Health Victoria, Prevention and Population Health
- Outdoors Victoria

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