

## Physical activity keeps you healthy

Regular physical activity has significant benefits for your health and wellbeing. Just 30 minutes of moderate activity each day can improve health and reduce the risk of developing certain conditions or diseases.

### Aim for at least 30 minutes a day

Health authorities recommend that everyone should have at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, on all or most days of the week. This activity can be accumulated in bouts of 10 minutes or more if it's more convenient.

There are many opportunities to be active throughout your normal daily routine, such as walking to and from work, buying lunch or walking children to school.

People who take part in vigorous physical activity (for example aerobics, netball or touch football) are encouraged to continue to do so – these activities can provide extra health benefits.

### Guidelines for good health

To help you make physical activity an important part of your day, the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians were developed. The guidelines refer to the minimum levels of physical activity required for good health. They are not intended for high level fitness or sports training. Try to carry out all the guidelines and, for best results, combine an active lifestyle with healthy eating.

The four steps to good health are:

- Think of movement as an opportunity, not an inconvenience. See any form of body movement as an opportunity to improve your health, rather than a time-wasting inconvenience.
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can. Make a habit of walking or cycling instead of using the car, or do things yourself instead of using labour-saving machines.
- Do at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days. Moderate intensity activity includes a brisk walk or cycling. Combine short sessions of different activities of around 10 to 15 minutes each to a total of 30 minutes or more.
- If you can, also try to enjoy some regular, vigorous exercise for extra health and fitness benefits. Vigorous exercise makes you 'huff and puff'. For best results, this should be added to your regular physical activity three to four days a week for 30 minutes or more each time.

### Aerobic exercise

Aerobic exercise is when your body uses oxygen to produce energy for physical activity. Aerobic means 'with oxygen'. Aerobic metabolism occurs when the body breaks down fat and glucose by combining them with oxygen. During intense aerobic exercise, your body uses more oxygen and your breathing and heart rate increase. Over time, regular aerobic exercise will improve your health and fitness and reduce levels of body fat.

### Types of aerobic exercise

Whatever activity you choose to do, it should be something you enjoy. Different forms of aerobic exercise include:

- Walking, jogging or running
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Aerobics classes and water aerobics classes
- Cycling
- Skating
- Line dancing
- Ballroom dancing.

### Benefits of regular physical activity

If you are physically active regularly, you tend to:

- Have improved long term health
- Be less likely to have a heart attack
- Feel more energetic
- Manage your weight better
- Have a healthier blood cholesterol level
- Have lower blood pressure
- Have stronger bones and muscles (less osteoporosis)
- Recover better from a heart attack
- Feel more confident, happy and relaxed, and are able to sleep better.

### An effective treatment for depression

Studies have shown that regular exercise can be used in isolation or in combination with other therapies to treat some forms of depression and anxiety. Even people who don't suffer from depression feel happier and more relaxed when they exercise regularly.

See over ...

## See your doctor first

It is advisable that you consult your doctor before starting your physical activity program if:

- You are a male over the age of 35 or a female over the age of 45
- 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.

## Tips for becoming active

Even if you have done no activity in the past, beginning some form of activity can set you on the road to improved health. Below are some tips to help you incorporate physical activity into your everyday routine:

- Choose an activity that you like so that your enthusiasm doesn't wane.
- Vary your program to prevent boredom.
- Try exercising with a friend to add an enjoyable social element to your program.
- Start gently – let your body be your guide on intensity.
- Warm up thoroughly before you start, by going through the motions of the activity to increase blood flow to the required muscles.
- Start off with short sessions until your fitness improves. Multiple smaller bouts of 10 minutes will bring benefits. It's fine to start with even shorter sessions and gradually build up if you haven't exercised for a while.
- Start gently and progress gradually. If you are overly fatigued, rest for a day, but remember the key to health is regular physical activity.
- Warm down after exercise with easy stretches to let your body 'cool down' slowly.
- Give injuries time to heal instead of trying to exercise through them.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Exercise physiologist
- Qualified physical education teacher
- Qualified sports coach.

## 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, the National Heart Foundation. The Better Health Channel is part of the Department of Human Services, Victoria.

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