
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.
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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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