

Physical Activity

Partaking in regular physical activity can improve your health and reduce your risk of certain conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and even depression. Today, about 70 per cent of the Australian adult population is not active enough to maintain good health. The good news is that it's never too late to become active. Beginning or resuming activity at any age will benefit your health.

If you have a medical condition, are above your most healthy weight, over 40 years of age or have not exercised regularly for a long time, see your health practitioner for medical advice before starting or increasing your activity. Similarly, if you are pregnant and haven't been regularly active but wish to begin, seek medical advice before getting started. Your health practitioner can provide advice on activity plans that are safe and helpful to your individual needs.

Health benefits

Physical activity, preferably combined with healthy eating, can have extensive benefits for your health in a variety of ways. Regular physical activity can:

- reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke
- reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- lower high blood pressure and/or high cholesterol levels
- reduce your risk of some cancers (e.g. bowel and breast cancer)
- increase your energy levels
- improve your emotional health and wellbeing
- help build strong, healthy bones
- ease back, muscle and joint pain
- assist you to maintain or reduce weight
- help you sleep better

How much physical activity is enough?

The Australian National Physical Activity Guidelines for adults recommends at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all days of the week to benefit your health.

There are many ways to achieve this – and it might not be as hard, or as time consuming, as you think. According to the guidelines, three 10 minute activity sessions are just as effective as 30 minutes of continuous activity.

Moderate-intensity and vigorous activity

Moderate-intensity activity is movement that causes a slight increase in your breathing and heart rate but you should still be able to talk whilst moving. Brisk walking, mowing the lawn or even vacuuming are examples of moderate-intensity activity.

For those who are able and who would like to achieve a greater level of health and fitness benefits, doing some regular vigorous activity can be beneficial in addition to regular moderate-intensity activity. Vigorous activity is movement that makes you 'huff and puff', for example, aerobics and running. For best results, three 30 minute sessions per week are recommended.

Points to remember

- think of movement as an opportunity to be active, not an inconvenience
- be active every day in as many ways as you can
- aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on most, preferably all, days
- if possible, include regular, vigorous activity for extra health and fitness

Top 10 tips for getting active

The following tips will help you increase or start getting active so as to improve and maintain good health:

- 1. Plan ahead** – Schedule physical activity into your daily routine and do your best to stick to it. A commitment to being active needs to be long-term, and should become a normal part of your everyday lifestyle. If time is limited, try getting up earlier or being active during your lunch break.
- 2. Equipment** – You do not need expensive equipment to begin exercising. Start with a good pair of training shoes and comfortable clothes. Take a water bottle and don't forget to wear sunscreen and a hat when exercising outside.
- 3. Get support** – You are more likely to succeed if you have the support and encouragement of family or friends. Surveys show that women prefer walking over all other activities and when they walk with friends they walk longer and report walking is more enjoyable. Group activities are more social and you can encourage each other to keep going.
- 4. Choose an activity that is right for you** – When choosing a new activity, take time to consider what would best suit you. Think about convenience, budget, pre-existing medical conditions and whether or not you will enjoy the activity. For example, you shouldn't take up water-skiing if you can't afford it, have to travel for hours and don't like getting wet!
- 5. Be creative** – Try something different, let your imagination run wild. Vary the places you go walking or try dancing or water aerobics. Be creative by incorporating activity in to your daily routine – take the stairs if possible, park your car further away or try walking to the shops. This means you complete your daily activity without having to find extra time.
- 6. Keep at it** – Occasionally there may be periods of time where you lose focus or interest. Do your best to get back to doing some physical activity when you can; try to think positively, plan ahead and always keep the benefits in mind. A small amount of activity is better than doing nothing at all.
- 7. Set goals** – Set both short and long-term goals so you have something to work towards. Be realistic, you won't be able to run a marathon in two weeks time but you might be able to walk every day for a week. Keep track of your achievements.
- 8. Reward yourself** – It's important to reward yourself when you achieve your goals. Having an added incentive can also help you to get going when you don't feel motivated. A reward could be anything from buying your favourite magazine to getting a manicure.
- 9. Listen to your body** – Exercising is not about 'no pain, no gain'. If an activity causes you pain either slow down or stop altogether. Pain is a sign that something might be wrong. If you are worried, see your health practitioner before continuing. This is especially important if you have an ongoing health condition, are pregnant or are over the age of 40.
- 10. Have fun** – Enjoyment is essential for maintaining a long-term commitment to being regularly physically active. Be selective in the activities that you choose, get involved in group activities and try to stay positive – your health is worth the effort and you will feel better for doing it.

Where can I get more information?

www.jeanhailes.org.au

www.betterhealth.org.au – Better Health Channel

www.heartfoundation.org.au – Heart Foundation

www.cota.org.au – COTA National Seniors Organisation

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your health practitioner.

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