

Physical activity and weight loss

BENEFITS OF LOSING WEIGHT

By reducing your weight you will help keep your blood pressure down and reduce the workload of your heart. This in turn will lead to a reduction in your risk of heart disease. Heavier bodies require more effort from the heart to supply oxygen. Being overweight also increases your risk of diabetes and suffering from joint problems, particularly in the weightbearing joints of the legs.

DOES PHYSICAL ACTIVITY HELP YOU LOSE WEIGHT?

- To reduce weight effectively it is important that the amount of energy you use up during your daily activities (your energy expenditure) is greater than the amount of energy you take in (the food you eat). Physical activity is a crucial tool in helping increase energy expenditure (burn calories) and can help use up stored fat.
- Physical activity also helps build muscle which speeds up your metabolic rate. This increases the amount of calories you burn even when you are not exercising.
- Reducing the fat around your stomach will help reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure, diabetes and having a heart attack or stroke.
- Physical activity also helps reduce high blood cholesterol levels.
- Physical activity, along with a healthy diet, helps reduce stress and improves your overall feeling of wellbeing and quality of life.

- If you do not know how much physical activity you can do safely or you have other medical concerns such as heart problems eg. angina or joint problems eg. arthritis, ask your GP or practice nurse for advice.
- Make sure you start slowly and build up to the recommended levels. Avoid high intensity, high impact activities, for example jumping up and down. This puts unnecessary stress on your joints.
- Wear appropriate and comfortable footwear.

If you get any of the following problems stop ask for medical advice from your GP or by contacting NHS Direct on 0845 4647:

- discomfort in your chest or upper body brought on by physical activity
- uncomfortable or severe breathlessness during your activity
- dizziness or nausea on exertion
- fainting during or just after doing physical activity
- palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- NHS Direct 0845 4647 or www.nhsdirect.co.uk
- NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk
- Healthy weight tools and advice from the BBC http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/treatments/healthy_living/your_weight/

WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITY IS BEST?

While stamina-based activity is particularly important for health when you are overweight, you also need to include some strength and flexibility-based activity to get the best health gains.

Stamina-type activities: Walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, tennis and housework (washing floors or windows)

Strength-type activities: Walking uphill, carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (digging or mowing) and housework

Flexibility-type activities: Dancing, yoga, Pilates, T'ai Chi and gardening

Tips on increasing your activity level

- Walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. Perhaps take a dog for a walk to make it more interesting or use a pedometer to count your steps (see back page).
- Look for opportunities to be active during your whole day. For example park at the far end of the car park, or walk one stop further to catch the bus, and take 10 minutes out of your lunch break to go for a walk.
- Try using the stairs instead of the escalator. If you do use the escalator, start by walking part of the way up and progress to walking up the whole way.
- Choose activities that you enjoy doing. Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable.

HOW MUCH AND HOW OFTEN?

Frequency

While 30 minutes on five or more days of the week is recommended for maintaining a constant weight, 45-60 minutes are recommended for weight loss. If this seems too much to start with, try starting with 4 or 5 x 10 minute walks spread throughout the day and work towards 3 or 4 x 15 minute walks. One goal is to try and increase your activity by 2 minutes each day.

Intensity

Moderate intensity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard and it shouldn't cause you pain. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time.

Advice

Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases until after about 10 minutes you have reached the level you can maintain for your chosen period of activity. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually.

Remember

Set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off.