

Physical activity and wellbeing

HOW DOES PHYSICAL ACTIVITY HELP YOU?

- It can help you lose weight particularly if you combine this with cutting calories and eating healthily.
- It helps build muscle which means you burn more calories even when you're not exercising.
- It helps protect you against other conditions which cause ill health like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and some cancers.
- In the long run, physical activity is as effective as drugs in the treatment of mild to moderate depression.
- Did you know that several short bouts of activity (eg. 3 x 10 minutes) is as useful as 30 continuous minutes?
- Physical activity helps reduce stress and improves your overall feeling of wellbeing and quality of life, as well as helping you to sleep well.

STAYING SAFE

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

- Discomfort in your chest or upper body
- Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness brought on by physical activity
- Dizziness or nausea on exertion
- Fainting during or just after exercise
- Palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.

WHAT NEXT?

- If you haven't exercised before or for a long time, it would be best to visit your GP to make sure you start in the right way. Your GP may also be able to advise you on local schemes organised by your Primary Care Trust.
- If you have a medical condition like arthritis, high blood pressure or diabetes, then a good source of information is the appropriate medical charity for your condition. Most of these charities offer specific exercise and lifestyle advice. Examples include the British Heart Foundation, Diabetes UK, Arthritis Research Campaign or Cancer Research UK.
- Local YMCA clubs or public gyms will offer a range of exercise opportunities, some of which may focus on specific age groups or medical conditions.

MORE INFORMATION

- www.activeplaces.com - if you are looking for a place to exercise then start here. You can put in your postcode and look for all facilities in your local area.
- www.interactive.uk.net - Interactive - Disability Equality in Sport - if you have a disability such as being deaf, visually impaired or physically impaired and you live in London this is a good place to start.
- www.nhs.uk - NHS Choices - lots of good advice about health and wellbeing and starting to exercise.

WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITY IS BEST?

While stamina-based activity is particularly important for health, you also need to include some strength and flexibility-based activity to get the best 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, or go with a friend, and to make it more interesting you could use a pedometer to count your steps.
- 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 and gradually 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

Your main aim is to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week. If this seems too much to start with, try starting with 3 x 10 minute walks spread throughout the day and work towards 2 x 15 minute walks and then 30 continuous minutes. 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. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time and still feel comfortable.

Advice

Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases for the first 10 minutes until 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.