

Build Activity Into Your Everyday Life

Falls & Frailty

Ageing, a loss of mobility, a lack of confidence on your feet, poor balance and co-ordination, and possibly underlying osteoporosis all increase the body's frailty and bring a very real fear of falls and fractures.

A conundrum however, exists for many people (both men and women) in this 'category' – the fear of falling stops you from being physically active, and this can lead to a loss of confidence and independence. By limiting your level of physical activity, your muscles waste (you lose muscle bulk) and become weak, joints stiffen and lose support from weak surrounding muscles, and lack of use results in loss of balance and motor control (your brain's ability to communicate quickly with your legs and feet). This compounds the problem and actually increases your risk of falling and sustaining an injury such as a fracture.

However, the more physically active you are, the better you can protect your body from falls and fractures. Being active strengthens your bones and muscles, making you stronger, and less susceptible to fractures. Strong muscles and stable joints give you more control when moving around which means better balance, co-ordination and reaction time.

Studies have shown that people of an older age who exercise regularly had a 21% reduced risk of falling. Performing specific balance exercises and doing more than 3 hours of physical activity a week reduced fracture risk (from falls) by 40% and the frequency of falls by up to 49%.

If you need more proof of how being physically active can help you, here are a few:

- 1 **Reduced** number of falls and risk of falls
- 2 **Improved ability** to perform activities of daily living
- 3 **Reduced risk** of sustaining an injury when falling
- 4 **Reduced severity** and progression of frailty
- 5 **Faster walking speed** due to improved nerve supply to the muscles and better communication between the brain and muscles of your legs and feet.
- 6 **Increased muscle strength.** Inactivity results in muscles wasting (losing their bulk or mass) and becoming weak. The more you use your muscles the stronger they become, giving your joints more support and better function. Stronger muscles also work more efficiently and demand less oxygen, making an activity or chore seem easier over time as you get stronger.
- 7 **Improved balance.** The more you physically do, the better the communication between the nerves in your brain, down to your feet. The better and faster they talk to each other, the safer you are – nerves are essential in maintaining balance, co-ordination and reaction time - all things that will help prevent a fall. The less you do, the more the 'doors of communication shut' between your muscles and nerves in your brain and legs.
- 8 **Improved cardiovascular and respiratory function.** This will result in you feeling less breathless and you'll be able to do more with less effort. Reducing your feeling of fatigue will result in greater ability and self-belief to do more.
- 9 **Improved fitness** and energy levels and reducing the feeling of exhaustion will result in better quality of life as you are able to do more with less effort.
- 10 **Greater confidence, independence and motivation.**



You should aim to be active daily, in short bouts of at least 10 minutes at a time, with a goal to accumulate at least 150 minutes per week. Physical activity is often enjoyable in groups with the social interaction being good for motivation, enjoyment, fun, and meeting new people. Group exercise classes also offer support and guidance, reducing the fear of exercising and injuring yourself. Even chair-based classes can be beneficial.

Walking, cycling, aqua, Tai Chi, an activity class at the retirement centre or local community or church hall are all excellent ways to get started. Remember, with ageing everything you do to prevent or delay the onset of frailty will also prevent or delay the onset of dementia.

As we mentioned earlier, strength and balance exercises reduce your risk of falls and if you are really concerned, you could start with chair-based exercises and then progress to standing classes. Ask your physical therapist for advice.

Don't worry if you have never done exercise before. It is never too late to start, the benefits can be felt almost immediately and even the smallest increase in daily activity level will reap huge rewards for your health. Just start gently and progress gradually over the first 3 months.



Making everyday life more active

Apart from formal exercise or group activities, you can build activity into your everyday life. Small changes will ultimately make big differences to your quality of life.

Ideas for making everyday life more active include:

- Swimming or aqua
- Playing with grandchildren
- Singing
- Walking club
- Exercise class
- Pilates, yoga, Thai Chi



- Take active breaks
- Walking meetings
- Stand when on the telephone
- Stand at your desk
- Take stairs instead of lift

- Home-based exercises
- Stand during advert break
- Walking
- Singing
- Gardening
- Housework
- Walking the dog

- Cycling
- Walk
- Park further away in the car park
- On public transport get off a stop earlier and walk

The Last Word

A good idea before starting an activity is to sit down with your therapist or even a family member or friend and write down what it is you want to achieve. Set goals, easy achievable ones initially. These will help build self-esteem and confidence. Then you can start looking from short-term easier goals (which may be as simple as walking 10 minutes every day, or achieving a walk around the block 3 times a week) to middle- and long-term ones, extending over the coming months and year.

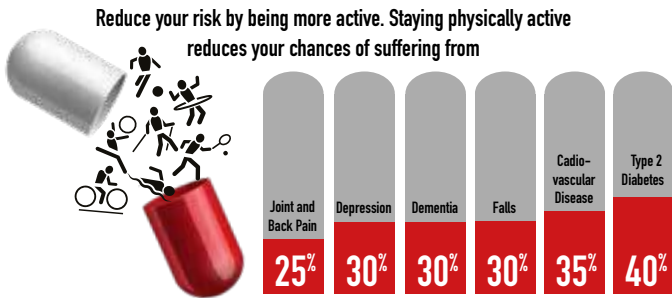
'Action planning' is the next step. Write down what you are going to do each day or as a weekly plan. Keeping these plans, together with a daily diary, will help you stay motivated and see the improvements over time. You can use self-monitoring devices like pedometers, wrist-worn accelerometers or smartphones to keep track of your daily step count. There are also many activity apps that can be downloaded to mobile phones to help you monitor your activity levels, motivate you or

provide you with daily exercise routines. Get help and advice from your physical therapist about what would best suit you and your condition.

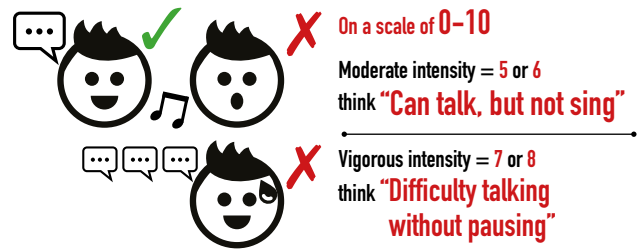
Make sure you have support – be it family and friends or a physical therapist, support group or exercise programme. The right support will be invaluable in keeping you motivated and encouraged, particularly on those bad days, and make you accountable for changing your life!

Gold Standard Exercise Recommendations for Health

If Exercise Was A Pill



What is Moderate Intensity Versus Vigorous Intensity Activity?



What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Between the Ages of 5-17?

- 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity – every day
- > 60 minutes daily will give even better health benefits
- Most of the daily physical activity should be aerobic
- But should incorporate vigorous – intensity activities that strengthen muscle and bone, at least 3 times per week



How Activity Intensity Reduces Your Risk of Dying



Reference: Domains of physical activity and all-cause mortality: systematic review and dose-response meta-analysis of cohort studies. <http://bit.ly/2S7BXOW>

What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Between 18-64?

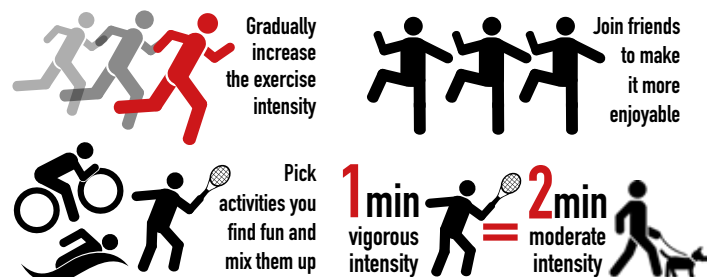
- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity
- Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes
- 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 150 of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity brings even greater health benefits
- Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week.



First Steps to Being More Active



TIP If you are starting out try breaking your daily goal into shorter bouts of 10 minutes at a time



What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Over 65 Years of Age?

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity
- Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes
- 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 150 of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity brings even greater health benefits
- Activities that enhance balance and prevent falls on 3 or more days per week
- Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups, on 2 or more days a week
- The goal is to be as physically active as your abilities and conditions allow.



Reference: Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health, World Health Organisation 2018