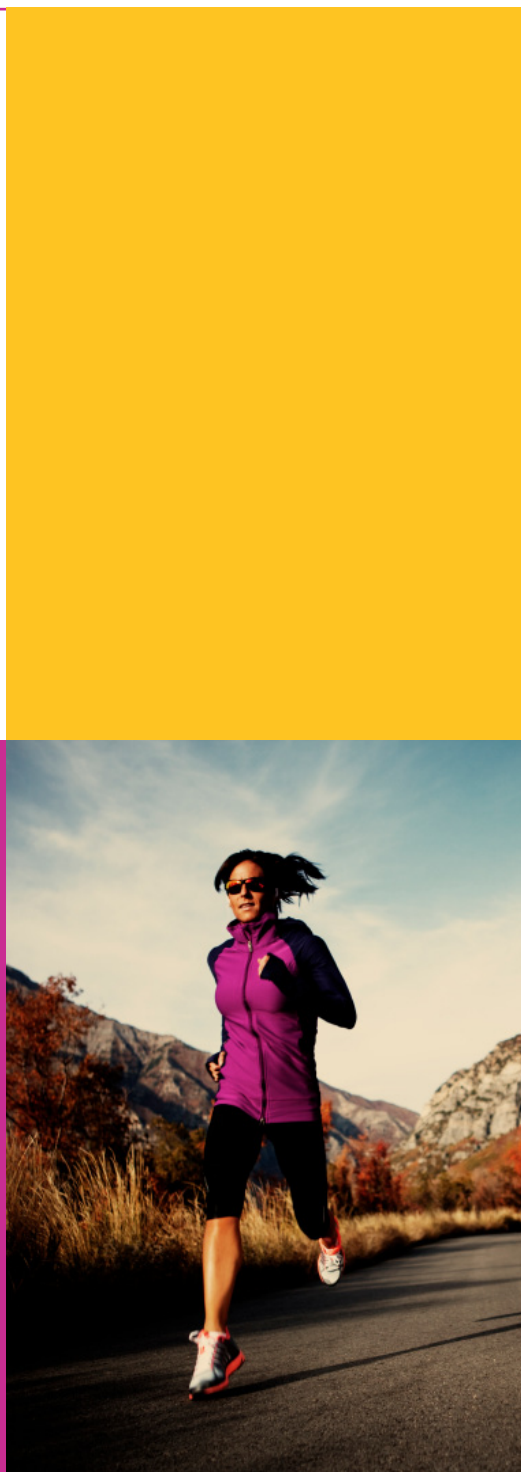




GUIDE TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & EXERCISE



Get active – what are you ‘weighting’ for?

There is absolutely no doubt that physical activity is associated with good health. Yet even when faced with the threat of illness, we still don’t change our habits. Many of us have good intentions in terms of staying in shape. But, despite our initial enthusiasm, these often dwindle after the first few weeks leaving us once again flat out on the sofa in front of the TV.

The key to avoiding this is to combine physical activity with a healthy diet that is both interesting and tailored to your needs and lifestyle.

It can be difficult to change your habits. But remember your health - and even your life - may be depending on it.

It’s not too late to live longer

The case for staying active couldn’t be stronger as the numerous health benefits gained through regular exercise are widely acknowledged. Here are just some of the reasons why we should be active. Regular physical activity can:

- reduce the risk of developing and dying from coronary heart disease - Britain’s number one killer
- reduce the risk of stroke
- reduce the risk of developing colon cancer

- reduce the risk of developing non-insulin dependent diabetes
- lower high blood pressure
- help people to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- help to build and maintain healthy bones and muscles, which reduces the risk of developing osteoporosis (brittle bones) and osteoarthritis
- increase levels of good cholesterol.

And that’s not all!

Besides helping to protect from health problems, evidence shows that regular physical activity can also have a positive effect on people’s moods, helping to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety. In general, exercise promotes psychological wellbeing and in turn reduces feelings of stress. If that wasn’t incentive enough, exercise can also slow down the ageing process and can increase your life span.

So, what are you waiting for?

No one is too young or too old to enjoy the benefits of regular physical activity. In fact, evidence indicates that exercise has benefits for all age groups.



How much physical activity should I do?

Moderate-intensity physical activity

For an adult, a minimum of 30 minutes of regular, moderate-intensity physical activity 5 days a week is recommended. This equates to using up about an extra 200 calories. Moderate-intensity physical activity will make your heart rate increase and should make you feel warm, slightly sweaty and slightly out of breath.

Such activities include:

- walking or cycling to and from work, or part of the way
- using the stairs instead of lifts
- walking short distances instead of taking the car, i.e. to the shops or to a friend's house
- doing heavy housework or doing it at a faster pace than normal
- DIY, such as painting or laying floors
- gardening.

Don't worry if this seems a little daunting, the good news is that you don't have to complete the full 30 minutes all at once and the activity doesn't have to be strenuous. In fact, it's possible to achieve your 30 minute a day target by making simple adjustments to your everyday life.

Once you've started you might want to try to increase the amount of time spent exercising to 45-60 minutes each day, particularly if your aim is to lose weight.

Quick fact

Physical inactivity is responsible for around 3% of all disease burden in developed countries. ¹



Aerobic exercise

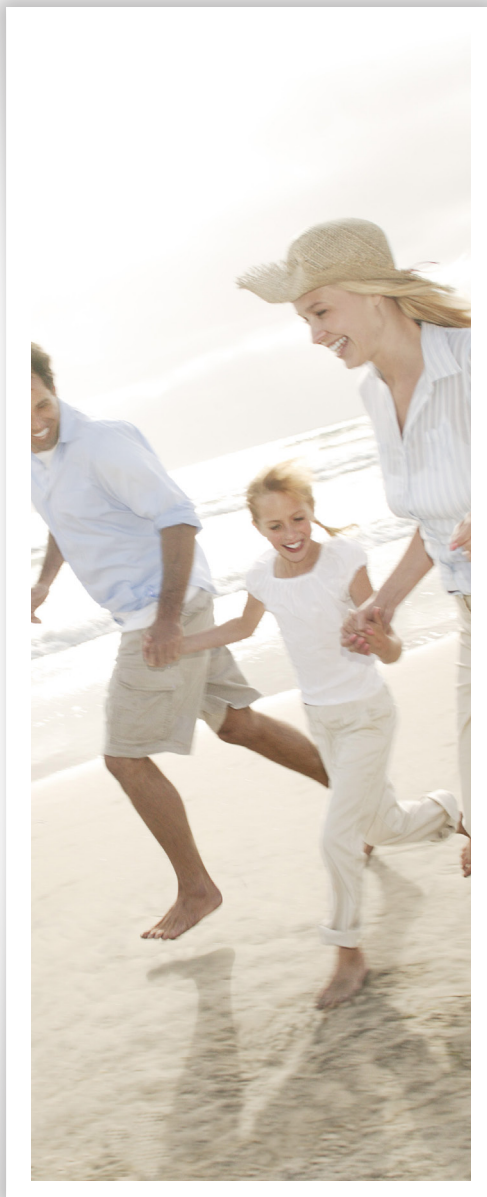
For the greatest health benefits, it's recommended that you complete 30 minutes of aerobic exercises at least three times a week as well as some kind of muscle strengthening activity and stretching. If you've been inactive for a while, it's best to start off with less intense activities and increase your exercise over time.

Aerobic activity is an important addition to the more general moderate-intensity exercise and includes activities that make you breathe hard and use large muscle groups at a regular, steady pace. Aerobic activities are beneficial if your aim is to boost your fitness level as well as to lose weight, as they burn more calories than other activities. There's also evidence to suggest that more strenuous activities help to strengthen your heart and prevent heart disease.

Aerobic activities include:

- running
- cycling
- swimming
- racket sports
- field sports
- going to the gym.

Stretching and strengthening exercises, for example using the weight machines at the gym, should also be a part of your physical activity program. These exercises help you to burn up additional calories, and also strengthen your muscles and bones to help prevent injury.



Be wise while working out

Despite all the health benefits of physical activity there are also some precautions you should keep in mind. The nature of some sports make it possible to suffer sprains, or even more serious injuries.

Endurance sports can be known to cause stress fractures, ongoing fatigue and even menstrual periods to stop in some women.

The health gains associated with physical activity massively outweigh the small risks involved. And if you're sensible you can reduce the risks even further. Here are some tips to help you exercise safely:

- **Seek advice** - before you begin an exercise program on your own or at the gym, consult your doctor or an exercise trainer who can teach you safe workout techniques. He or she can also help you evaluate which types of exercise are best for you and your health aims. At the gym, always ask a fitness instructor to show you the best way to use the exercise equipment.
- **Stretch** - warm up and gently stretch before exercising, then warm down and stretch gently afterwards to maintain your flexibility and help prevent injury. Stretching increases blood flow and loosens muscles. Don't bounce while stretching - it can damage muscle tissue even without you realising it. Hold stretches for 10 to 30 seconds for 1 to 3 repetitions.
- **Know when to stop** - if you feel tightness in your chest, severe shortness of breath or dizziness, or if you have any uncomfortable pain at all while exercising, stop your workout immediately and seek medical help from either your doctor or an exercise trainer. You don't need to stop if you feel muscle soreness after starting a new exercise routine - that is normal - just take things easily and allow yourself time to rest and recover before you work out again.

The key to keeping your routine going is to find an activity or, better still, a range of activities that you enjoy and that fit in with your lifestyle. Try out lots of activities until you find something that you enjoy as it will be much easier for you to keep up your routine this way. Set yourself realistic and achievable goals as this will also help you to stay motivated.

Quick fact

7 out of 10 adults in the UK don't do enough regular physical activity to maintain a good level of health. ²

A healthy diet

It's important to combine physical activity with a healthy diet to take full advantage of the health benefits associated with exercise. Body weight is governed by the amount of calories you consume and use up each day. Pretty much everything you eat and drink contains calories and everything you do helps burn these off. However, if you consume more calories than you burn off, your body will store the extra calories and you will gain weight. On the other hand, if you consume fewer calories than you use your body uses the stored calories causing you to lose weight. So, even when exercising regularly it's still important to have a healthy diet.

Eating healthily

A healthy balanced diet is essential for good health. The key to keeping weight in check is to combine roughly the right foods in roughly the right amounts and to vary what you eat. Getting into a healthy eating routine can be difficult. It's important to take it slowly and avoid 'faddy' diets, setting goals that work with your tastes and fitness plan. But make sure you include fruit and vegetables, starchy and wholemeal foods and protein rich foods.

You should aim to eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. This can be achieved easily by:

- having a glass of fruit juice or a fruit smoothie with your breakfast in the morning
- eating a side salad or a portion of vegetables with lunch or dinner
- snacking on fruit throughout the day.

The concept of a healthy diet is based on 3 principles:

Balance – make sure you eat different foods in the right proportion to each other.

Moderation – get a feel for how much food is enough and how much is too much. The feeling of fullness can take around 15 minutes to register with the brain. It's important that you regulate the amount of food you eat then wait for a while before eating more to let you gauge if you're still hungry. Eating in moderation teaches the brain the difference between hunger satisfaction and fullness.

Variation – healthy diets should include varied food types. This not only has health benefits in itself but also helps to avoid boredom when eating. Trying new foods can be interesting and rewarding!

Quick fact

People who lead active lifestyles are less likely to die prematurely.³

Drinking healthily

To keep hydrated you should aim to drink at least 6-8 glasses of water per day and increase this when you exercise and during hot weather. It's best to minimise non-diet fizzy drinks as these tend to be very high in added sugar.

Remember that the thirst sensation doesn't kick in until quite late which means that if you simply drink in response to thirst then you're already likely to be dehydrated.

Try to get into the habit of drinking throughout the day - whether you're thirsty or not. Having a large bottle of water on your desk and making sure it's empty by the time you leave for home often works. You can also do this with 2 or 3 pieces of fruit.

In terms of alcohol, it's recommended that women can drink up to 2-3 units per day and men up to 3-4 units without significant risk to their health. Alcohol consumption should be spread throughout the week and you should always avoid binge drinking.

Over indulgence in alcohol can seriously affect your health. Also, remember that some alcohol is very high in calories, so take this into consideration when you're planning your health routine.

Quick fact

People who exercise regularly feel more energetic, maintain a healthier weight and live longer.⁴



Useful Links

You can also obtain more information from the following websites:

www.bbc.co.uk

www.bhf.org.uk

www.sustrans.org.uk

www.healthyliving.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

References

¹ <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/default.asp?sID=1090848376816>

² http://www.bhf.org.uk/keeping_your_heart_healthy/staying_active.aspx

³ <http://www.patient.co.uk>

⁴ <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/exercise/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

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