



Benefits of physical activity



Health



Wellness



Nutrition



Support

Introduction

"If exercise could be packaged in a pill, it would be the single most widely prescribed and beneficial medicine in the nation." Robert Butler, National Institute on Aging - American physician, gerontologist, psychiatrist, and author.

Physical activity can be the answer to many of the challenges we face when it comes to improving our health. It supports us to maintain a healthy weight and keeps our heart and lungs working effectively.

It also prevents and helps to improve health conditions such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease.

We should be active every day to improve our physical and mental health. Any activity is better than none, and even simply standing instead of sitting provides some benefit.

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How much activity should we be doing?

As part of a healthy, active lifestyle, we should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity every week.

We should also look to spread times when we're active across the week (aim for at least 20-30 minutes each day), while each period of activity should last at least 10 minutes to ensure we get some benefit.

In addition to movement, we also need to make sure we work on strength and balance at least twice a week. Strength and balance training methods include Pilates, yoga, resistance training, and balance exercises.

Many of us have busy lives, and it can be difficult to find time to fit physical activity into your schedule - but doing so is really Important and absolutely achievable with the right approach.

Remember: It has to be sustainable. Any activity you choose to take part in needs to be something you can continue doing for years to come, not just for a short phase. That's the only way you'll have a real and lasting positive impact on your health and wellbeing.

Other ideas to increase your levels of physical activity include:

- upping the intensity of your current activities
- involving your family by walking to and from school where possible
- standing up when talking on the phone, and taking the stairs rather than the lift or escalator

What does 'moderate activity' mean?

During moderate intensity activity you should notice that your heart rate has increased, and your breathing rate has got faster. You may also notice you get warmer and start to sweat a little, but you should still be able to talk. You should be able to carry on with moderate activity for up to an hour without feeling like you need to stop.

Here are some different types of activities and how they would be described...

Sedentary: Hardly moving, sitting or lying down, working at a desk.

Light: General housework, cleaning, carrying out rubbish.

Moderate: Walking, cycling, shopping, low circuits or aerobics, swimming.

Vigorous: Playing sport, dancing.

Very vigorous: Sprinting, heavy weight exercise, press ups.

However, you can make any exercise light, moderate or vigorous.

For example, when running on a treadmill you can change the speed or the incline at which you're running, thereby increasing or decreasing the activity level. So, remember to choose something you will enjoy and adjust your approach to suit your needs.

Sitting less

With our often hectic lifestyles and having to juggle work, family and other commitments, finding the time or motivation to fit activity into our routine can be tricky. Even the minimum target of 20-30 minutes a day can feel high-on impossible if your normal day means you spend most of your time sitting down (for instance, at a desk job).

Even without scheduled moderate physical activity, finding time to simply move more through the day is good for us. This could be something as simple as taking a regular break from your desk to stand up and stretch, or walk around the room.

Any opportunity you can find in your day to move your body will be of benefit.

Active travel

Active travel (walking or cycling) is a simple and effective way to build physical activity into your everyday life. You don't need to find additional time to be active and you can achieve your active minutes target by travelling to and from work, school or even to the local shops.

Cycle to Work

Ask your employer about whether they are registered with a Cycle to Work scheme. It's an employee benefit that saves you up to 42 per cent tax when buying a bike and accessories.

Basically, you pay nothing up-front, and the payments are instead taken tax efficiently from your salary by your employer.

Not all employers are the same, but a good place to start to find out more is www.cyclescheme.co.uk.

Be Well

At Be Well, we have regular walking and cycling groups to help you be more active and improve your confidence and stamina when it comes to choosing active travel. We also offer cycling lessons for children and adults, while our Leigh-based 'Bike Library' gives you the chance to loan a bike (and accessories) for up to two months free of charge, with the option of buying it at a special rate at the end of the loan period. To find out more visit bewellwigan.org/cycling.

Bee Active

Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM)'s Bee Network has made it easier to get around by bike or on foot, and TfGM has a range of opportunities across the region - including cycle training, route planning, walking tips and much more. To find out more visit www.beeactive.tfgm.com.



Does physical activity help with weight loss?

The simple answer is yes, it does. More importantly, becoming more physically active has been shown to help with keeping weight off long term. Research also shows that changing dietary behaviours alongside becoming more active is more beneficial than just diet or activity changes on their own.

If you are struggling to meet the recommended 150 minutes of activity time per week, remember to start small. Every opportunity you take to move more or stand up will help you on your journey.

Everyone is different and our bodies will respond to different activities, so make sure to try new things and find what works for you and your routine.

Our Be Well leisure centres have activities for the whole family, from gym sessions and swimming to fun, social sports sessions and group exercise classes such as yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi, dance and much more. We also have lots of free walks and cycle rides you can join.

But you don't need to go to a leisure centre or join a group to be more active. Simple ways to move more include:

- visiting parks and green spaces
- walking or cycling to and from work or school
- playing sport with friends, or going dancing
- home exercise using videos on social media channels
- playing active games with your family
- housework and gardening

Whatever it is, it all counts and it all helps.

Smartphones, apps and watches

There are many apps and devices to help you monitor your activity levels.

If you own a smartwatch or wearable tracker, have a look at the device settings to set up and monitor your active minutes. You can monitor your heart rate and get personalised activity goal trackers and reminders to move.

These devices don't need to be very expensive, with an activity tracker watch available from as little as £25. And if you already own a smartphone, there are lots of apps, you could use for free. Each has their own benefits but may charge for more premium features. Popular apps include:

- Strava
- NHS Couch to 5k
- Apple Fitness
- Google Fit

Final thought

By adding physical activity into your everyday routine, you will make it easier to maintain and improve your health long term. Anything counts, so find what works for you and stick at it.

If you would like to learn more or require more information and support, please get in touch!

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