

THE BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical activity helps your body work better and protects you from disease. The good news is that you don't have to run a marathon to see the benefits. You can start slowly and progress as you get fitter – remember, every bit helps!

The benefits of cardiovascular exercise:

- **Weight loss:** Exercise burns kilojoules, increases your metabolic rate and gives you a firmer body.
- **A stronger heart and healthier lungs:** These organs adapt so everyday tasks like climbing stairs become easier.
- **Increased energy and better sleep at night**
- **Improved ability to keep infections at bay**
- **Increased fitness:** You'll be able to exercise harder and do more without getting out of breath as easily as before.
- **Stronger bones:** Weight-bearing exercise builds bone density, which becomes important as you get older.
- **Protecting your joints:** Exercise keeps cartilage healthy, which helps to ease swelling, pain and fatigue.
- **Improved self-esteem:** Keeping in shape will have you looking good and feeling great.
- **Decreased levels of depression, anxiety and stress:** Exercise lowers stress hormones in your blood and increases your body's feel-good hormones. This gives your mood a natural boost and helps you relax.
- **Lower risk of cancer and chronic lifestyle diseases:** Exercise improves your overall health and vitality, and helps to increase your good cholesterol (HDL) levels. It also decreases your risk of developing chronic lifestyle diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.
- **Live long – live better:** Exercise not only extends your lifespan, it also gives you a better quality of life.

Five strategies to move more

Understanding what keeps you from exercising and overcoming your barriers can help you set an exercise programme in motion.

01 | **Do you have 10 minutes? Short bouts of exercise count!**

Many people battle to find time for a half-hour exercise session every weekday. But research shows that exercise does not have to be continuous to bring about health benefits; shorter bouts of exercise can also help. So, whenever you can, do a few short exercise sessions in your busy day – it all adds up! Build up your daily quota with shorter bursts of activity throughout the day – for example, in 10 minutes you can: dance to three of your favourite songs, walk around the block or take a quick bike ride, walk up and down the stairs at work, or do a set of squats, lunges and push-ups at your desk, or while cooking or playing with the kids.

02 | **Keep it simple**

Rather than starting a structured training programme, take steps to 'activate' your day by including different types of physical activity in your daily routine. You could take a 20-minute walk during your lunch break, climb the stairs rather than using the lift or escalator, or park your car far from the entrance at shopping centres and carry your groceries so you include more exercise in your day.

03 | It doesn't have to be all or nothing

Activity doesn't have to be exhausting or painful. Moderate-intensity exercise has as many health benefits as vigorous physical activity. Make sure you're always able to breathe evenly and talk while exercising, even while your heart and breathing rate increase.

04 | Plan

Schedule exercise in your diary and make sure you're prepared. This helps so you can make the sessions a sustainable part of your life. Keep a bag with your training kit or sportswear and a towel in your car.

05 | Enlist a buddy

Studies show you're more likely to stick to exercise programmes if you have a training partner. When someone's depending on you, you'll tend to skip scheduled sessions less and it helps to keep each other accountable.

Setting smart goals

Setting targets is an essential part of getting and staying fit. Use these smart strategies to keep going:



Specific: Make goals clear and unambiguous.

Think: What do I want to achieve, why (what are the benefits), who with, where and how?



Measurable: If a goal can't be measured, how do you know you have made progress or achieved it?

Think: How many or how much do I need to do?



Achievable: Make goals realistic and achievable.

Think: How can I make it happen?



Relevant: Choose goals that matter and you will get support.

Think: Is it worthwhile?



Time bound: Give goals a target date. A commitment gives focus, motivation and a sense of urgency.

Think: What can I do in six months or six weeks; what can I do today?

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