

Physical activity

Being physically active is good for your health and wellbeing and it doesn't need to be a vigorous workout. Try to build up your exercise patterns slowly over time, and look for opportunities to be active in your (and your families) normal routine.

Ten good reasons to be more physically active

Being more active can help to...

- Improve overall health
- Reduce the risk of developing coronary heart disease and possibly stroke
- Lower blood pressure
- Increase HDL levels (the 'good' cholesterol) and decrease LDL (the 'bad' cholesterol)
- Reduce the risk of diabetes or improve diabetes control
- Maintain a healthy weight and shape and reduce body fat
- Reduce the risk of some cancers eg breast and bowel cancer
- Prevent osteoporosis by strengthening bones
- Increase muscle strength, joint flexibility and balance, helpful for arthritis and injury prevention
- Reduces stress, anxiety and depression
- Raise self-esteem and confidence

Exercise for a healthy heart

'Aerobic' exercise is particularly beneficial for the heart. For most people this means activity of light to moderate intensity which should gently increase your breathing and heart rate. It should leave you warm and a bit puffed, but not gasping for breath. It should still be possible to hold a conversation.

Examples of aerobic activities include:

- Brisk walking, jogging, cycling
- Swimming, dancing
- Use of equipment at the gym such as the rowing machine, stair stepper, treadmill and stationary bike.

In contrast 'anaerobic' exercise, also known as isometric, is when the muscles use up oxygen faster than the blood can supply it.

Anaerobic activities are usually of high intensity and brief duration, such as sprinting or weightlifting. They do not offer the same benefits for the heart as aerobic activities and are considered dangerous for people with heart disease.

Those who have had a heart attack are advised to avoid anaerobic, vigorous or high intensity exercise.

How much is enough?

The following is recommended for adults:

- Activity of moderate intensity for at least 2½ hours each week. For instance this could be 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. Each bout of activity needs to be at least 10 minutes.
- Being active for longer (up to 5 hours a week) increases health benefits. It can help you change your body shape, reduce tummy fat and lose weight
- Exercises such as lifting, carrying and resistance training helps strengthen muscles and are recommended at least twice a week
- One way of being more active is to reduce the amount of time in sedentary activities such as sitting

HEART UK's guidelines

- Regardless of fitness level, start 'slow and easy'. Gradually increase the intensity and length of time
- Exercise should be sustained. Choose an aerobic activity and build up to the 30 minute goal – or more, if comfortable doing so
- If you feel chest pain or shortness of breath stop and rest
- Being active only brings health benefits if you do it regularly. So find enjoyable activities and build them into your daily routine
- Make sure that you drink plenty of water whilst exercising
- If you have never exercised before or have not exercised for a long time speak to your GP before starting a new exercise programme

Being active as part of a busy lifestyle

People often cite lack of time as a reason for not being physically active. But with some creative thinking there are ways to build exercise into a busy lifestyle. It is good to aim for around 10,000 steps a day. But work up gradually. A pedometer will help you monitor just how many steps you take each day.

Instead of taking the car, why not walk, cycle or jog? When taking the bus, try getting off two stops earlier and walking the rest of the way.

While sustained activity is the goal, shorter bouts still contribute. There are all sorts of possibilities in and around the house. If there are stairs, use them often. Try pedaling away at a stationary bike while reading, watching television or talking on the telephone. Performing very

physical housework or working outside in the garden are also ways to keep active.

If you have been inactive for some time, start with small amounts of physically activity and gradually build up the length, frequency and intensity over time.