

NATIONAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES FOR AUSTRALIANS

The guidelines refer to the minimum levels of physical activity required for good health. They are not intended for high level fitness or sports training.

Try to carry out all guidelines and **for best results combine an active lifestyle with healthy eating.**



think of movement as an opportunity, not an inconvenience.



be active every day in as many ways as you can.



put together at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days.



if you can, also enjoy some regular, vigorous exercise for extra health and fitness.

NATIONAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

Guidelines



Where any form of movement of the body is seen as an opportunity for improving health, not as a time-wasting inconvenience.

Think of movement as an opportunity, not an inconvenience

Movement in modern times

The technology of today has reduced much of the need for human movement. Cars now reduce the need for walking. Machines carry out heavy work for us. Home entertainment such as TVs, videos and computers keep us inactive for long periods of time.

The need for even small amounts of movement or physical activity in the course of our daily lives has been reduced. For example, the effort required changing channels on TV, or to open the garage door has been eliminated for many by the use of remote control technology. The effort of washing dishes and clothes has been replaced by the automatic dishwasher and clothes washing machines. Even the need to move to communicate has been reduced by the hand-held telephone and electronic mail (e-mail) in the office.

The need for movement

All of these changes have come upon us gradually, almost unnoticed, with advances in technology. Yet the human body was designed to move. Through hundreds of thousands of years of evolution, humans have been active in the process of survival-hunting, gathering or farming food, collecting fuel and participating in manufacture and commerce.

Decreases in activity in society have been associated with an increase in obesity and other health problems. Without awareness of these problems, humans have begun to enthusiastically embrace the benefits of machines and to consider 'unnecessary' movement as an inconvenience. This is combined with our social attitudes that the more appliances we have to do things for us, the more successful we are.

Changing our mind-set about movement

Underlying all education about increased physical activity for health must be a change in our attitude towards movement. If all movement is regarded as an opportunity to improve health rather than as a time-wasting inconvenience, the benefits of modern technology can be enjoyed without the negative health consequences.

FOR AUSTRALIANS

Be active every day in as many ways as you can



Make a habit of walking or cycling instead of using the car, or do things yourself instead of using labour-saving machines.

The health benefits of becoming more active

The increase in effort-saving technology in modern societies has coincided with increasingly busy lifestyles. Hence, we not only have less need to be active, but seem to have less time. However, it is possible to regain some of the health benefits of regular movement through being more active in everyday life.

Recent research has shown that even the most inactive or sedentary people can gain health benefits if they become even slightly more active. Based on these findings, governments around the world have now identified increased physical activity as a priority in improving the health of their populations.



Ways of increasing activity

Small increases in daily activity can come from small changes carried out throughout the day. For example, making a habit of walking or cycling instead of driving or riding in a car; doing some gardening; walking up stairs instead of using the lift or an escalator; and/or doing things by hand instead of using labour-saving machines. All these things can add to the level of daily physical activity. It is important to remember that some activity is better than none, and more is better than a little.

Being and thinking active

Being active in lots of little ways throughout the day, combined with an attitude that regards all forms of physical activity as an opportunity to improve our health, will help increase the amount of physical activity we carry out and improve our well-being. Being active in small ways is likely to provide health advantages to almost all people, irrespective of age, body weight, health condition or disability.



Put together at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days



Moderate-intensity activity doesn't have to be continuous

In the past, it was thought that for exercise to be beneficial, it had to be carried out vigorously, 3 to 4 days a week for a minimum of 30 minutes. However, a review of exercise research has shown that this only applies to increases in physical fitness. Improvements in indicators of health - such as blood pressure, blood cholesterol and body weight - can result from putting together shorter amounts of moderate-intensity activities totalling a minimum of 30 minutes a day on most days, or doing 30 minutes continuously.

Moderate-intensity activity will cause a slight, but noticeable, increase in breathing and heart rate. A good example of moderate-intensity activity is brisk walking at a pace where you are able to comfortably talk but not sing. Other examples include mowing the lawn, digging in the garden, or medium-paced swimming or cycling.

Moderate-intensity activity includes things such as a brisk walk or cycling. Combine short sessions of different activities of around 10 to 15 minutes each to a total of 30 minutes or more. The 30 minutes total need not be continuous.

Moderate-intensity activity should be carried out for a minimum of around 10 minutes at a time without stopping. The 30 minutes total can be achieved through one, or a combination of activities such as parking the car further away from a destination and walking briskly, getting off a bus before the final stop, or active play with children. It can also be achieved through combining activities such as cycling, brisk walking, dancing or swimming for 30 minutes, or carrying out any of these for at least 10 minutes each for a total of 30 minutes or more.

It is important to remember that the 30 minutes total need not be continuous.

Combining activity with family, community or social life

To provide positive benefits, and to be enjoyable and sustainable, the activity, or combined activities designed to total at least 30 minutes per day, can be part of work, family, community or social life. Putting together 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity will add to the health benefits of being more active every day.

If you can, also enjoy some regular, vigorous activity for extra health and fitness



Vigorous exercise makes you 'huff and puff'. For best results, this should be added to the above guidelines on 3-4 days a week for 30 minutes or more each time.

Vigorous activity and fitness gains

This guideline does not replace earlier recommendations to put together 30 minutes of physical activity on most days. It adds an extra level to this recommendation for those adults who are able and who wish to achieve greater health and fitness benefits. **Children and teenagers under the age of 18 should follow this guideline routinely.**

Research has shown that able-bodied people can get added health and fitness benefits (beyond those achieved through increasing daily movement or regular moderate-intensity activity), by carrying out some regular vigorous exercise. These benefits include extra protection against heart disease. Vigorous exercise will also help to improve fitness and sports performance in activities requiring a high level of energy use.

How hard is vigorous?

'Vigorous' implies activity, which makes you 'huff and puff', and where talking in full sentences between breaths is difficult. In technical terms this is exercise at a heart rate of 70-85% of maximum heart rate (MHR), where MHR is calculated as 220 minus your age. Vigorous exercise can come from active sports such as football, squash, netball and basketball, and activities such as aerobics, circuit training, speed walking, jogging, fast cycling or brisk rowing. For best results, this type of activity should be carried out for a minimum of around 30 minutes on 3 to 4 days a week.

Seeking medical advice

Although there's no age barrier to carrying out vigorous activity, medical advice is recommended for those who have been previously inactive, who have heart disease, or close relatives with heart disease, or who have other major health problems. Vigorous activity in pregnancy is not recommended without strict medical supervision.

Warm-up, cool-down, stretching and a gradual build-up from an inactive level are also recommended with vigorous exercise, in line with most recommended fitness training programs.

About the Guidelines

The physical activity guidelines for Australians have been developed through extensive consultations with a wide range of experts in physical activity¹. They incorporate recent thinking about physical activity for health², in addition to the more widely understood concepts of exercise³ for fitness⁴.

Guidelines 1 to 3 stress the importance of all forms of movement⁵, including moderate-intensity physical activity⁶, particularly in those who are currently inactive. Guideline 4 illustrates the added health and fitness benefits which can be gained from higher levels of physical activity or exercise. The guidelines refer to the minimum level of physical activity required for the attainment of good health and a healthy body weight. They are not meant for high level fitness or sport training. They also do not include the warm-up, cool-down and stretching requirements of more vigorous sports or exercise.

For best results, the guidelines should be combined with an ongoing pattern of healthy eating. In general, this means eating a wide variety of foods including plenty of breads and cereals (preferably wholegrain), vegetables (including legumes) and fruits. It also involves choosing foods which are low in fat, particularly saturated fat, and also low in salt. Only a moderate amount of sugars and foods containing added sugar should be chosen, and for those who drink alcohol, it should be done in moderation.

Dietary Guidelines for Australians can be obtained from government departments of health or community health centres.

Definitions

For the purpose of this document the following definitions have been adopted:

- 1 *Physical activity* refers to any activity that involves significant movement of the body or limbs.
- 2 *Health*, in this instance, refers to metabolic well-being as reflected in low risk levels of blood fats, blood pressure and body weight as well as general physical and mental well-being.
- 3 *Exercise* is a type of physical activity defined as a planned, structured and repetitive body movement done to improve or maintain physical fitness.
- 4 *Fitness* relates to the capacity of the heart and lungs to supply oxygen-rich blood to the working muscles and the capacity of the muscles to use oxygen to produce the energy for movement.
- 5 *Movement* is defined here as any motion of the body and limbs.
- 6 *Moderate-intensity physical activity* will cause a slight, but noticeable, increase in breathing and heart rate and may cause light sweating in some people.

For more information about the guidelines and how to get started call

1800 020 103

and ask for the PHD publications requestline

