

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 counts and every bit helps!

The benefits of cardiovascular exercise include:

- **Weight loss:** Exercise burns kilojoules, increases your metabolic rate and delivers 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 fend off infections.
- Increased fitness: You'll be able to exercise harder and do more without getting out of breath as easily as before.
- Weight-bearing exercise builds strong bones, which will stand you in good stead as you get older.
- Exercise protects joints by easing swelling, pain and fatigue and by keeping cartilage healthy.
- Improved self-esteem: Keeping in shape will have you looking good and feeling great.
- Decreased levels of depression, anxiety and stress: Any form of exercise lowers stress hormones in your blood and increases your body's feel-good hormones, which gives your mood a natural boost and helps you relax.
- Decreased risk of cancer and chronic lifestyle diseases: Exercise improves your overall health and vitality, and helps to increase your good cholesterol (HDL) levels. The more exercise you do, the lower 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 ensures a better quality of life.

5 STRATEGIES TO MOVE MORE

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

#1 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 need not be continuous to bring about health benefits; bouts of exercise can also be beneficial. So, whenever possible, include several 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 beside your desk, in between cooking, housekeeping or playing with the kids.

#2 It doesn't have to be all or nothing

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

#3 Ditch the no-pain-no-gain mindset

Activity doesn't have to be exhausting or painful. Moderate-intensity exercise brings about as many health benefits as vigorous physical activity. To exercise at an appropriate level of intensity, make sure you are always able to breathe evenly and talk while exercising, even while your heart and breathing rate do increase.

#4 Plan

Schedule exercise in your diary and make sure you're prepared so you can make sessions an easily accessible and sustainable part of your life. Have a bag with your training kit or sportswear and a towel in your car.

#5 Enlist a buddy

A training partner is shown to increase adherence to exercise programmes. When someone's depending on you, you're more likely to turn up to your scheduled sessions and it helps to keep each other accountable.

SETTING SMART GOALS

Setting targets is an essential part of getting and staying fit. Ensure success with these smart strategies:

- **Specific:** Make goals clear and unambiguous.
Think: What do I want to achieve, why (what are the benefits), who, where and with which requirements?
- **Measurable:** If a goal can't be measured, how do you know you have made progress or achieved it?
Think: How many/ 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/ six weeks, what can I do today?

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