



Physical activity: vital to global health

www.worldheart.org

PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

Physical inactivity kills

- Globally, physical inactivity contributes to some 3.2 million deaths a year and is the fourth highest risk factor for death in the world, ahead of unsafe sex, under-nutrition, and alcohol use.
- Physical inactivity causes more than one in four cases of heart disease and of diabetes deaths, and more than one in five cases of breast and colon cancer.

Physical activity levels are declining worldwide

- Globally, over 30 per cent of adults are insufficiently active.
- Around the world, more and more people are physically inactive, including those in developing countries.

Physical inactivity is not just a problem of the wealthy

- Of the deaths attributable to physical inactivity, 2.6 million are in low- and middle-income countries.
- While physical inactivity is more prevalent in high- and middle-income countries, even in low-income countries it is among the top ten risk factors contributing to death.

Physical activity improves health and quality of life

- Physical activity helps control blood pressure and blood sugar, prevent overweight and obesity, and strengthen bones.
- Fit and active children concentrate better; they are more likely to have good test scores and to be successful students.

Increasing physical activity saves lives. We must act now to:

- Ensure that walking, cycling and public transport strategies are central to transport policy.
- Establish comprehensive physical education as a right for all children.
- Develop community-wide social marketing programmes to promote a physically active culture:
 - WHO: Global recommendations on physical activity for health. http://whalibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241599979_eng.pdf
- Sign the Toronto Charter on physical activity and pass it on. www.globalpa.org.uk/charter
- Find out about risk factors in your country. <https://apps.who.int/infobase/Index.aspx> http://gamapservr.who.int/gho/interactive_charts/ncd/mortality/cvd/atlas.html



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What is physical inactivity?

Physical activity is bodily movement, produced by skeletal muscles, that requires energy expenditure. This includes play, games, sports, "active" transport (such as walking, cycling), chores, recreation, physical education, or planned exercise, in the context of family, school, work and community activities. The World Health Organization recommends that children get at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity activity daily and that adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity in a week. People who get less than these levels of activity are considered physically inactive.

Why does physical activity matter?

Physical activity helps prevent many major non-communicable diseases (NCDs), promotes mental health and improves social wellbeing and life quality. Children and adolescents who are physically active have a better chance of being healthy adults. Along with other common risk factors like hypertension, tobacco use and unhealthy diet, physical inactivity is an important factor in the rise of NCDs, which now kill more people around the world than all other causes combined. Physical inactivity also reduces concentration and school performance.

Why are people becoming less physically active?

Rapid urbanisation, growing dependence on motorised transport and an increase in sedentary work all reduce levels of physical activity around the world. Barriers to getting more exercise include traffic, crime, pollution, lack of access to sporting facilities, lack of leisure time, increasing popularity of sedentary leisure activities (especially among children and youth) and cultural restrictions on women.

Who is most affected by physical inactivity?

Around the world, across all income groups, more and more people have become physically inactive, especially in fast-growing urban areas. Poor countries and communities bear the greatest burden of the health effects of NCDs because the people living there have less access to health services and seldom have insurance or social protection to help them cope with the economic and social consequences of early death and disability.

What can be done?

Governments and communities must make promoting physical activity a priority. Increasing opportunities for physical activity requires a comprehensive approach and cross-sector partnerships that involve different departments and levels of government, businesses, community groups, schools, the media and the health system. National policies and action plans are needed to reach large numbers of people and provide direction, support and coordination for different sectors and activities. These include public education to raise community awareness of the importance of physical activity, changes in urban environment and planning that make it easier for people to choose to be active in their neighbourhoods, and physical activity programmes in communities, schools and workplaces.

For detailed references visit <http://www.worldheart.org/children>

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