

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

MAY 2026

WHAT IS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

♥ Physical activity means any movement of the body that uses energy. It is not limited to exercise or going to the gym. It includes all the ways we move in our daily lives. This can include activities such as walking, cycling, working, playing, doing household tasks, or taking part in sports. Whether it happens at home, at work, while travelling, or during leisure time, it all counts as physical activity.



WALKING



CYCLING



WORKING



PLAYING

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CAN VARY IN INTENSITY

LIGHT

Light activities include **slow walking** or **everyday tasks**

MODERATE

Moderate activities, such as **brisk walking or cycling**, make you breathe a bit faster;

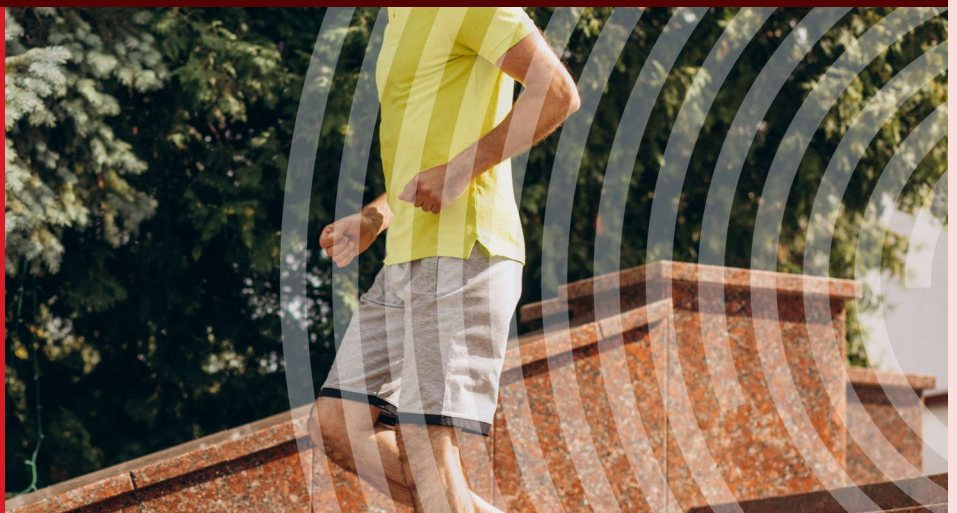
VIGOROUS

Vigorous activities, such as **running or playing sports**, require more effort and increase your heart rate significantly.

♥ Physical activity is part of everyday life and is shaped by our routines, environments and habits. It does not need to be structured or time-consuming. Simple choices, like walking more or sitting less, can add up and have a real impact on health and well-being over time¹.

1. WHO. Physical Activity. Available at: <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity>

IT ALL COUNTS:
HOME, WORK,
TRAVEL AND
LEISURE TIME





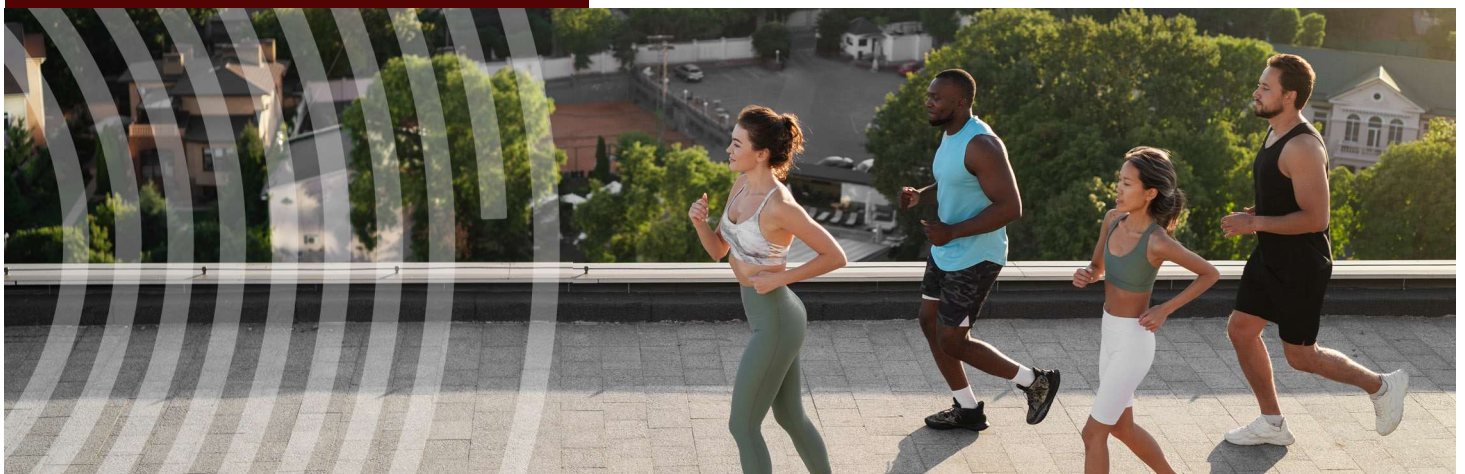
WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF DOING REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

5 MILLION

estimated deaths every
year are linked to physical
inactivity globally

- ♥ **Physical activity is one of the most important things people can do to protect their health.** Globally, physical inactivity contributes to an estimated 5 million deaths every year.
- ♥ **Regular physical activity reduces the risk of many non-communicable diseases** such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some cancers, while also improving mental health by reducing stress, anxiety and symptoms of depression. Regular physical activity helps the heart, muscles and lungs work better. It can lower blood pressure, improve cholesterol levels, help control blood sugar and reduce excess body fat. These benefits significantly reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and other chronic conditions.²
- ♥ **Better sleep, mental health and emotional well-being** are not only important in themselves, but they also help people build and maintain healthy behaviours that reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- ♥ **People who move from being inactive to regularly active** can gain additional years of life and, importantly, improve the quality of those years. Even small increases in activity can lead to better physical function, greater independence and improved well-being².

2. Lee, I.-M., et al. (2012). Effect of physical inactivity on major noncommunicable diseases worldwide



**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS
PEOPLE CAN DO TO PROTECT THEIR HEALTH**

IS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SAFE FOR EVERYONE?

FOR MOST PEOPLE, YES

- ♥ **Yes, for most people, physical activity is safe and provides substantial health benefits.** Regular movement reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, obesity, certain cancers and depression, while improving physical function and quality of life³.

EVEN FOR PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC CONDITIONS?

- ♥ **Even people living with chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, including heart failure, diabetes, hypertension or musculoskeletal conditions can benefit from physical activity.** In many cases, regular moderate activity is recommended as part of treatment. Evidence and professional guidelines report that the health benefits of physical activity greatly outweigh the potential risks⁴.

WHEN TO SEEK ADVICE

- ♥ **Importantly, people with certain medical conditions, those who have been inactive for a long time or those experiencing symptoms such as chest pain, dizziness or severe shortness of breath should consult a healthcare professional before starting vigorous exercise.** Gradual increases in activity and choosing appropriate forms of movement can help reduce risks. Importantly, the greatest health risks are associated with physical inactivity rather than with physical activity itself.

GUIDANCE

- ♥ People living with chronic conditions or disabilities can also be active, with appropriate adaptations. WHO's Package of Interventions for Rehabilitation (PIR) offers guidance on how to support safe participation.

WEATHER CONDITIONS AND AIR POLLUTION

- ♥ **Extreme weather conditions can also affect how people exercise safely,** including people with long-term-health-conditions (e.g., heart disease) or short-term-health-conditions (e.g., pregnancy) During very hot weather, it is important to stay hydrated, avoid exercising during the hottest hours of the day and reduce the intensity of activity if needed. In very cold conditions, wearing appropriate clothing and warming up properly can help prevent injury. When air pollution levels are high, people may consider exercising indoors or choosing locations away from heavy traffic.

3. WHO. (2020). WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behavior. <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/f3885485-e7eb-4504-8026-edd9bb53a6ee/content>

4. Bull FC, Al-Ansari SS, Biddle S, et al. World Health Organization 2020 guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour. World Health Organization 2020 guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour | British Journal of Sports Medicine

HOW MUCH AND WHAT KIND OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DO I NEED?



10-MINUTE WALK

For anyone who is not currently active, starting small is important.³ Even short periods of activity, such as a 10-minute walk performed each day and/or on 2 or 3 times per day, can be beneficial, with the goal to gradually build towards the recommended levels⁵.



2,500-3,000 STEPS

Recent research suggests that health benefits from walking can begin with as few as 2,500-3,000 steps per day, with the greatest benefits often seen between 7,000 and 9,000 steps per day. This means that people do not necessarily need to reach the traditional 10,000 steps per day target to improve their health. Every additional step counts⁵.



60 MINUTES

Patients recovering from heart disease can significantly improve their heart fitness with as little as about 60 minutes of moderate physical activity per week⁷.

Moderate activities include brisk walking, cycling at a comfortable pace, dancing or gardening. Vigorous activities include running, fast cycling or playing sports that significantly increase breathing and heart rate.⁴

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS VARY BY AGE:

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS (5-17 YEARS)

- ♥ At least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.
- ♥ Examples include playing, running, cycling or sports.
- ♥ On at least 3 days per week, activities should help strengthen the muscles and bones, such as climbing, sports or jumping.

ADULTS (18-64 YEARS)

- ♥ 150-300 minutes of physical activity per week or 75-150 minutes of vigorous activity, or a combination of both.
- ♥ Examples include brisk walking, cycling, swimming or sports.
- ♥ Focus on muscle strengthening at least two days per week.
- ♥ It is also important to limit the time spent sitting and replacing it with movement, when possible.

OLDER ADULTS (65 YEARS AND ABOVE)

- ♥ Follow the same recommendations as adults, but with an added focus on maintaining independence and preventing falls.
- ♥ Activities that improve balance and strength, such as light strength exercises, yoga or tai chi, should be performed at least three days a week.

Recommendations for people with chronic conditions and those living with disabilities are grouped together.

5. Stens, N. A., Bakker, E. A., Mañas, A., et al. (2023). Relationship of daily step counts to all cause mortality and cardiovascular events. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 82(15), 1483-1494. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jacc.2023.07.029>

6. Buckley, J. P., Davdra, B., (2025), Is 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous physical activity a potential 'over prescription' for cardiac rehabilitation? A systematic analysis of trials in the cochrane review, *Heart* 2025;111(Suppl 5):A1-A32. <https://doi.org/10.1136/heartjnl-2025-BACPR.1>

SOME TIPS TO GET STARTED AND STAY ACTIVE IN MY EVERYDAY LIFE



SHORT TRIPS



TAKE STAIRS



WORK BREAKS



PLAY



CHORES



ENJOY IT

- ♥ Being active does not always mean going to the gym, playing sport or joining an exercise group. Ideally, physical activity should be fitted into everyday life.
- ♥ Simple changes can make a big difference, such as walking or cycling for short trips to shops, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking during work breaks or playing actively with children.
- ♥ Actively conducting daily chores at home or place of work, such as energetic cleaning, washing and carrying of items can also count towards one's daily physical activity. Especially when done with a positive attitude, this can help bring healthier lifestyles.
- ♥ Choosing activities that are enjoyable, such as dancing, sports, hiking or exercising with friends, can help people stay motivated over time.
- ♥ Setting realistic goals and gradually increasing activity levels can also help build lasting habits. Support from friends, family or community groups can make staying active easier and more enjoyable.
- ♥ Healthcare professionals can also help by giving advice on how to safely increase physical activity.

HOW DO ENVIRONMENTS AND SOCIETY SHAPE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

- ♥ People's ability to be physically active is strongly influenced by the environments in which they live, work and travel.
- ♥ Cities and communities that have safe sidewalks, bike lanes, parks and green spaces make it easier for people to stay active.
- ♥ On the other hand, environments that depend heavily on cars, have unsafe streets or lack public spaces make it harder for people to stay active.
- ♥ Social factors also play a role. Work schedules, cultural habits and community norms can affect the types of and how much physical activity people are able to do in their daily lives.



WHAT SHOULD SYSTEMS AND POLICIES DO TO SUPPORT AND INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

- ♥ Increasing physical activity across populations requires action from many sectors, including health, education, transport, urban planning and sport.
- ♥ Using a multisectoral approach to encourage relevant industries across the board to use advertising methods that incorporate subtle imaging of physical activity as the better/ more fashionable choice.
- ♥ Governments can encourage active lifestyle by investing in safe walking and cycling infrastructure, creating parks and public recreational spaces and supporting community sport and physical activity programmes.
- ♥ Schools can promote lifelong healthy habits by including regular physical education and active play in daily routines. Workplaces can also encourage movement through flexible breaks, active commuting options and opportunities to reduce sitting time.
- ♥ Health systems can support physical activity by encouraging healthcare professionals to discuss and promote movement as part of routine care and chronic disease management.

HOW CAN I ADVOCATE FOR MY GOVERNMENT TO SUPPORT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

Everyone can play a role in promoting physical activity in their community:

- ♥ One way to start is by raising awareness. Talking about the benefits of physical activity with friends, family, community groups or local organizations can help build support for healthier environments.
- ♥ People can also engage with local decision-makers by supporting initiatives that promote walking, cycling, safe parks and recreational spaces. This may include participating in public consultations, contacting local representatives or supporting community campaigns that promote active living.
- ♥ Joining or supporting organizations that advocate for healthier cities, active transport and access to public spaces can also strengthen these efforts, where public health, medical services, leisure services and planning and transport leaders come together

