

Move to improve: how exercise can help your health

Whatever your age or ability, exercise can help to improve your health and wellbeing. Here, we describe the advantages of regular exercise in more detail, and what you can do to work more movement into your everyday life.

Almost everyone knows that regular exercise is great for both physical and mental health. The good news is that no matter what your age or ability, these benefits can be gained just by moving a little more every day.

How much exercise?

To stay healthy, adults should try to be active daily and aim to do at least 150 minutes of physical activity over a week, through a variety of activities.

For most people, the easiest way to get moving is to make activity part of everyday life, like walking or cycling instead of using the car to get around. The more activity you do, the better, and taking part in activities such as sports and exercise will make you even healthier.

How difficult should it be?

For any type of activity to benefit your health, you need to be moving quickly

enough to raise your heart rate, and you should be breathing faster and feel warmer than at rest. This level of effort is called moderate intensity activity. If you're working at a moderate intensity you should still be able to talk but you won't be able to sing the words to a song¹.

An activity where you have to work even harder is called vigorous intensity activity. It is known that vigorous activity has more health benefits than those gained via moderate activity.

You can tell when it's vigorous activity because you're breathing hard and fast, and your heart rate has gone up quite a bit. If you're working at this level, you won't be able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath.

Don't stay still for too long

Not only should you try to raise your activity levels, but you should also

reduce the amount of time you spend sitting down, if you can.

Common examples of sedentary behaviour include watching TV, using a computer, using the car for short journeys and sitting down to read, talk or listen to music.

This type of behaviour is thought to increase your risk of developing many chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes, as well as leading to weight gain and obesity.

Crucially, you can hit your weekly activity target but still be at risk of ill health if you spend the rest of the time sitting or lying down so its important to move as much as you can.



Top tips to move more to improve your health

- Walk instead of driving or using public transport
- When on the phone, walk don't sit
- If you are watching TV, get up and move during ad breaks
- Stretch each day for flexibility and balance
- Take a walk, clean your home, work in the garden, play outdoors with your grandchildren or children. Any and all activity counts.

For more information on how to exercise for your level and ability visit: www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/keeping-active/benefits-of-exercise/

