



# Getting active

## How much and how do I fit it in?

We all know exercise is good for us but how much should we do, how hard should we work and how are we supposed to find time to fit it all in?

Evidence shows that regular exercise can:

- increase levels of HDL or "good" cholesterol,
- lower high blood pressure,
- help improve body composition by burning fat,
- promote healthy blood sugar levels,
- promote bone density,
- boost the immune system,
- improve mood and reduce the chance of depression.

Despite the strong case for staying active, many people find it difficult to adapt their daily lives to incorporate physical activity. With cars on most driveways and the decline in the number of physically active jobs, 70% of the adult population is sufficiently inactive to be classed as "sedentary". Being sedentary increases the risk of a heart attack or stroke by the same amount as smoking.

It's not just the threat of future illness to think about though – being active makes you feel great now!

## Are you active enough?

For an adult, regular, moderate intensity physical activity means doing about 30 minutes of activity on most days, such as a two-mile brisk walk, that should make you feel warm and mildly out of breath.

You may think that being on your feet all day is enough as you are exhausted when you get home, but you won't have challenged your heart, lungs or muscles enough to benefit. In fact, a brisk walk or bike ride before or after work will perk you up from a long day.

## Why aren't you more active?

People give many reasons for not taking up exercise:

- lack of time due to work or family commitments,
- cost of equipment or gym membership,
- lack of facilities nearby,
- personal safety when exercising outdoors alone,
- poor weather or night-time lighting,
- feeling too tired

However, there are ways to get round all of these potential barriers if you put your mind to it. Involve your family, friends and colleagues – they'll thank you for it when you're more energetic and cheerful! The important thing is to make physical activity a priority, schedule it in to your daily life and **stop making excuses!**

## Getting active

If you have previously been inactive and 30 minutes of activity per day sounds like a tall order, the good news is that 3 separate sessions of ten minutes can count towards the total.

It's possible to achieve your 30 minute target by making fairly simple changes to your everyday routine, without joining the gym or running a marathon.

Examples of everyday activities that count:

- walking up stairs instead of using lifts
- for short journeys, walking instead of driving
- doing the housework at "double-time"
- cycling to work
- taking a Q-active class
- playing with your kids in the park
- dancing

### You don't have to go mad!

Many people are put off physical activity because they believe that only vigorous exercise or playing sport counts as healthy activity. We're not asking you to run for miles or squeeze yourself into lycra - there is now strong scientific evidence that moderate intensity physical activity is enough to bring about real benefits in terms of promoting health and preventing illnesses. You can do that in your regular clothes without getting all red and sweaty.

### Making it fun

The key to being active enough is to find an activity, or range of activities, that you enjoy and that don't feel like a chore. Not everyone sees exercise as fun, and doing something you find boring just because it's good for you is very difficult to sustain.

Try out new sports or activities until you find something you like. Try exercising with a friend, at a pace that still allows you to talk.

What makes you tick? If you are competitive - try a sport, like to dance? Try activities to music. Get bored easily? Make sure you vary your activities – learn a new skill such as a martial art, trampolining or a watersport. Maybe you could buy yourself some new exercise clothes that you like wearing and feel good in.

### Staying active

Even when you usually enjoy exercising, there will be days when you just can't seem to find the motivation to get active. Here are some practical tips to help keep up enthusiasm:

- Keep a diary. Whatever sport or activity you do, this can help you. Note down how far you ran or the match score, your pulse, how you felt etc. That way you can look back and see how you have improved over time.
- Collect inspiration. Stick quotes from coaches, athletes, or anyone successful around your house and/or your office. Inspirational stories from people who have achieved against the odds may help - if they can do it, so can you.
- Remember the hardest part is actually getting your kit on and going out the door so exercise before, after or even at work so you won't get side-tracked at home.
- If you feel like you're too tired or just can't be bothered – just go out for a ten minute walk. Dog owners tend to be fitter as they have to walk more – so why should the pet owners get all the benefits. Join a dog-walking friend or take the time to finally be on your own – we bet you end up going for more than 10 minutes!
- Enjoy it! Exercising releases chemicals in the brain, such as serotonin, that have a strong affect on your mood, helping reduce anxiety, stress and depression. Whenever you don't feel like exercising, remind yourself how good you'll feel afterwards.
- Ask yourself when you ever regretted being active, going out for a walk, to the gym etc? Chances are you always feel better afterwards, even if you didn't feel like it at first – so what are you waiting for?!