

What is physical activity?

Physical activity is any kind of activity that gets your body moving.

The types of physical activity that can help you get fit and stay healthy include:

- **Aerobic or "cardio" activities** that make your heart beat faster and make you breathe harder, such as brisk walking, riding a bike or running. Aerobic activities strengthen your heart and lungs and build up your endurance.
- **Strength training activities** that make your muscles work against, or "resist," something, such as lifting weights or doing push-ups. These activities help tone and strengthen your muscles.
- **Stretches** that allow you to move your joints and muscles through their full range of motion. Stretching helps you be more flexible and avoid injury.

What are the benefits of physical activity?

Being active is one of the best things you can do to get fit and stay healthy. It helps you to:

- Feel stronger and have more energy to do all the things you like to do.
- Focus better at school or work and perform better in sports.
- Feel, think and sleep better.
- Reach and stay at a healthy weight.
- Lose fat and build lean muscle.
- Lower your risk for serious health problems.
- Keep your bones, muscles and joints strong.

Being fit lets you do more physical activity. And it lets you work out harder without as much effort.

How can you make physical activity part of your life?

Get at least 2½ hours of exercise a week. Walking is a great option. You also may want to do other activities, such as running, swimming, cycling and playing tennis or team sports.

Pick activities that you like — ones that make your heart beat faster, your muscles stronger, and your muscles and joints more flexible. If you find more than one thing you like doing, do them all! You don't have to do the same thing every day.

Get your heart pumping every day. Any activity that makes your heart beat faster and keeps it at that rate for a while counts.

Here are some great ways to get your heart beating faster:

- Go for a brisk walk, run or bike ride.
- Go for a hike or swim.
- Go in-line skating.
- Play a game of touch football, basketball, or soccer.
- Play tennis or racquetball.
- Climb stairs.

Even some household chores can be aerobic — just do them at a faster pace.

Vacuuming, raking or mowing the lawn, sweeping the garage and washing the car all can help get your heart rate up.

Strengthen your muscles during the week. You don't have to lift heavy weights or grow big, bulky muscles to get stronger. Doing a few simple activities that make your muscles work against, or "resist," something can help you get stronger.

For example, you can:

- Do push-ups or sit-ups, which use your own body weight as resistance.
- Lift weights, dumbbells or use stretch bands at home, in a gym or at your local community centre.

Stretch your muscles often. Stretching will help you as you become more active. It can help you stay flexible, loosen tight muscles and avoid injury. It can also help improve your balance and posture and can be a great way to relax.

Be sure to stretch the muscles you'll be using when you work out. It's best to warm your muscles slightly before you stretch them. Walk or do some other light aerobic activity for a few minutes, and then start stretching.

When you stretch your muscles:

- Do it slowly. Stretching is not about going fast or making sudden movements.
- Don't push or bounce during a stretch.
- Hold each stretch for at least 15 to 30 seconds, if you can. You should feel a stretch in the muscle, but not pain.

- Don't hold your breath. Breathe out as you do the stretch, and then breathe in as you hold the stretch.

If you're worried about how more activity might affect your health, have a checkup before you start. Follow any special advice your doctor gives you for getting a smart start.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.

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