

Be Active during COVID-19

WHAT IS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

Physical activity includes all forms of active recreation, sports participation, cycling and walking, as well as activities you do at work and around the home and garden. It doesn't have to be exercise or sport – play, dance, gardening, and even house cleaning and carrying heavy shopping is all part of being physically active.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when so many of us are very restricted in our movements, it is even more important for people of all ages and abilities to be as active as possible. Even a short break from sitting, by doing 3-5 minutes of physical movement, such as walking or stretching, will help ease muscle strain, relieve mental tension and improve blood circulation and muscle activity. Regular physical activity can also help to give the day a routine and be a way of staying in contact with family and friends.

WHY DO WE NEED IT?

Regular physical activity benefits both the body and mind. It can reduce high blood pressure, help manage weight and reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and various cancers. It also improves bone and muscle strength and increases balance, flexibility and fitness. For older people, activities that improve balance help to prevent falls and injuries. For children, regular physical activity helps support healthy growth and development and reduce the risk of disease in later life, and through regular activity, children can develop fundamental movement skills and build social relationships.

Regular physical activity also improves mental health and can reduce the risk of depression, cognitive decline and delay the onset of dementia - and improve overall feelings of wellbeing.

HOW MUCH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS RECOMMENDED?

WHO has detailed recommendations on the amount of physical activity people should do to benefit their health and wellbeing.¹ Here are the minimum levels we recommend:

Infants under the age of 1 year need to

- be physically active several times a day.

Children under 5 years of age

¹ For children under the age of five years - <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/311664>; For youth and adults - https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44399/9789241599979_eng.pdf;jsessionid=1CA0AB344ADA8498780C49A85807429B?sequence=1

- should spend at least 180 minutes a day in physical activities, with 3-4 year-olds being moderately or vigorously active for an hour a day.

Children and adolescents aged 5-17years

- all children and adolescents should do at least 60 minutes a day of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity, including activities that strengthen muscle and bone, at least 3 days per week.

Adults aged over 18 years

- should do a total of at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity throughout the week, including muscle-strengthening activities 2 or more days per week.
- older adults with poor mobility should do physical activity to enhance balance and prevent falls on 3 or more days per week.

But any physical activity is better than none. Start with small amounts and gradually increase duration, frequency and intensity over time.

Being active during the COVID-19 pandemic is challenging for us all. Because the opportunities to be physically active seem to be more restricted, it is even more important to plan in every day the ways to be active and to reduce the time spent sitting for long periods. Put simply, it is a critical time to ensure we all move more and sit less.

SO HOW DO I STAY SAFE WHILE EXERCISING IN COVID-19?

Do not exercise if you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing. Stay home and rest, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority.

If you are able to go for a walk or bicycle ride always practice physical distancing and wash your hands with water and soap before you leave, when you get to where you are going, and as soon as you get home. If water and soap are not immediately available, use alcohol-based hand rub.

If you go to a park or public open space to walk, run or exercise always practice physical distancing and wash your hands with water and soap, before you leave, when you get to where you are going, and as soon as you get home. If water and soap are not immediately available, use alcohol-based hand rub. Follow the directions of your local health authority in regards to any restrictions on the number of people with you and/or restrictions on the use of public outdoor play or exercise equipment.

If you are not regularly active start slowly and with low intensity activities, like walking and low impact exercises. Start with shorter amounts, like 5-10 minutes, and gradually build up to 30 minutes or more continuously over a few weeks. It is better and safer to be active for

short periods more frequently than to try and be active for long periods when you are not used to it.

Choose the right activity so that you reduce the risk of injury and that you enjoy the activity. Choose the right intensity according to your health status and fitness level. You should be able to breath comfortably and hold a conversation while you do light- and moderate-intensity physical activity.

HOW DO I STAY ACTIVE IN AND AROUND THE HOME?

Try and reduce long periods of time spent sitting, whether for work, studying, watching TV, reading, or using social media or playing games using screens. Reduce sitting for long periods by taking short 3-5 minute breaks every 20-30 minutes. Simply stand up and stretch or even better, take a walk around the house, up and down the stairs, or into the garden. By just moving around and stretching you can improve your health and wellbeing. For more ideas and illustrations of healthy stretches see (EURO weblink²)

Set up a regular routine to be active every day, by planning a physical activity or exercise break either by yourself, by joining an online class, or by setting up a time to be active online with your friends or colleagues. Making a specific time to be active helps ensure you get your daily physical activity. Put the time in your diary, and it will help remind you. Stick with it, as this will help you build a regular routine, and help you adjust to new ways of working, study and family life under COVID-19 restrictions

Be active with your family and friends, connecting with others can help you and your family in the home and elsewhere spend time together and be active. Planning time to be active with your children with active games at home, walks in the parks, or cycling can be a way the whole family can relax, be together and be active and healthy whilst at home.

Set yourself and your family Be Active goals, by choosing a specific type of activity, time of day and/or number of minutes you will do every day. Get each family member to choose their own goal which sets a bit of a challenge but is realistic with help from family or friends and motivation. Record your progress on a weekly activity chart and, if you think it would help, reward yourself with something you value.

MORE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IDEAS TO HELP YOU STAY ACTIVE

For Infants under 1 year of age

² http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-technical-guidance/stay-physically-active-during-self-quarantine/_recache?fbclid=IwAR2RQYVYBnmpDCMjBwqmoz0hZxzmit_9yKzXu6ZhjGNywrTEzWOUQefU8V0

- Spend regular time doing floor-based play with your baby in a prone position (‘tummy time’) and spread this throughout the day while baby is awake.

For Children under 5 years of age

- Active play in and around the home – invent games which involve being active and can develop skills in throwing, catching, kicking, as well as developing posture and balance.
- Active play and games where children get out of breath, such as running around, skipping and jumping.

For Children and adolescents aged 5-17years

- Active games and active play with family.
- Join in online active games or activity classes, also look for online physical education classes as well as exercise routines suitable for adolescents.
- Set up playground games indoors such as Jump rope and hop-scotch – make up new games and challenges that involve being active.
- Learn a new skill – for example try to learn to juggle.
- Encourage doing some muscle strength training activities such as lifting weights or use improvised weight such as bottles full of water or sand.

For Adults

- Climb up the stairs as much as you can, think of it as an opportunity to be active.
- Use household chores as a way to be more physical activity.
- Make time for fun, such as dancing to music.
- Join in an online exercise class or make up your own routine to music you enjoy that uses the major muscle groups and raises your heart rate.
- Do some muscle strengthening activities such as lifting weights or improvise using full bottles of water or simply use your own body weight and do sets of press ups, sit ups and squats.

WHERE TO GET MORE HELP AND INFORMATION

For more ideas use internet search platforms and check out social media for suggestions and access to free resources suitable for children of all ages and adults of all fitness and abilities.