

# Physical Activity



Regular physical activity is good for your health. Being physically active can help you maintain a healthy body weight, manage stress, manage or even prevent depression, anxiety, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, and reduces risk of a number of health conditions (e.g., colon and breast cancer, stroke, cardiovascular disease). If you are not currently active and have a health condition, you should talk to a physician before starting a new activity. For most people, you can start to slowly and gently increase your activity. Here are some important things to think about:

## How Much Activity Do You Need

Experts who have studied the effects of physical activity on health tell us that we should aim for at least 30-60 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. But that doesn't mean that your first goal for the next two weeks should be 30-60 minutes of activity every day! To experience benefits for mood and anxiety, even just one short walk can make a difference.

The 3 things to think about for how much activity you need are: intensity, duration, and frequency

- *Intensity* – how hard your body is working. For example:
  - light = slow walking
  - moderate = fast walking or light jogging
  - vigorous = running, biking quickly
- *Duration* – number of minutes
- *Frequency* – number of active sessions per week

## Start Slow and Set Realistic Goals

*Begin with small changes.* If you have been doing very little physical activity most days, then start with a fairly small change. For example, you might begin with the goal of doing a brisk 10-minute walk three times a week. If this goal becomes comfortable and you're able to maintain it for a week, then you might want to gradually increase it – maybe you'll start walking for 15 minutes on one of the days or increase the number of times you walk each week. Eventually, by slowly increasing your goals, you will reach the recommended level.

*Small amounts add up!* You don't have to do 30-60 minutes of activity all at one time – you can add up each 10-minutes of activity over the course of a day.

## Choose Activities that you Enjoy

You have lots of different options. Pick activities that you think you might like or that you have enjoyed before. There are three main kinds of physical activity to choose from: *Endurance*, *Flexibility* or *Strength and Balance* (see Canada's Physical Activity Guide: <http://www.paguide.com>).



### **Endurance**

- Continuous activities that make you feel warm and breathe deeply (e.g., walking, dancing)



### **Flexibility**

- Gentle reaching, bending and stretching



### **Strength and Balance**

- Lifting weights (or own body weight), resistance activities

Experts recommend that you try to include physical activities from each of these categories. But if you can't do that, do what you can – add activity to your life as much as you can, within realistic limits.

### **Build Activity into your Life**

Choose activities that are convenient and that fit into your daily schedule – maybe walking to a local store instead of driving, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, moving around more at home, playing more actively with your children, getting in the habit of doing a gentle exercise routine at a certain time each day, or doing exercise classes offered on television, the Internet, or on a DVD.

### **Plan ahead**

Schedule your goals into your week – if you write your goals down you are more likely to do them. It is also helpful to think of things that might keep you from being active. For instance, have the supplies you need on hand (e.g., clothes, shoes, music). Change your environment – both home and work - to support more activity. For example, create a space in your home for an exercise mat, keep your running shoes by the door at home, wear or take comfortable shoes to work so that you can take short walks during the day, or put a list of your weekly physical activity goals on the fridge.

### **Get Family and Friends Involved**

Ask family and friends for support in becoming more active. Doing physical activity with a friend or family member can also make it easier to keep active – and helps you meet another goal of social activity! Think about the people who will support you and who you might be active with.