



Exercise and Physical Activity

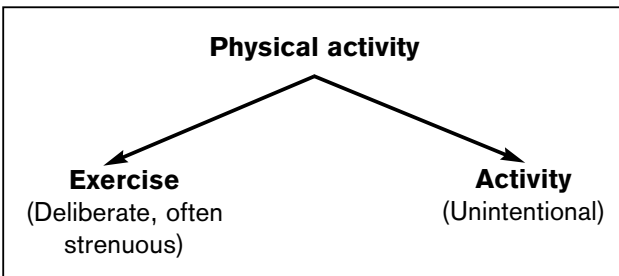
What is physical activity?

Physical activity is being active, making the body move.

It can include walking, cleaning, housework, running, gardening and more.

Is there a difference between physical activity and exercise?

Generally exercise can be considered as a form of physical activity (although there are no precise definitions, this is the way most people understand them).



Exercise is often used to refer to activity that is deliberate – such as going for a run or a swim, rather than activities that are part of daily life, e.g. cleaning the house. Exercise is often understood by people to be harder or more intense, and something that you need to be fit to do.

'Being active' is generally used to refer to less strenuous activity such as walking and activities that are part of everyday life, e.g. cleaning and gardening. Being active also includes exercise.

Why should I be active?

We know that being active regularly has many positive health effects:

- ✦ It reduces the risk of all lifestyle diseases.
- ✦ It reduces the risk of circulatory problems.
- ✦ It reduces the risk of joint problems.
- ✦ It uses up energy, which can help in weight control.

Activities		
<i>High-intensity activity</i>	<i>Moderate-intensity activity</i>	<i>Low-intensity activity – suitable for all</i>
Running	Walking fast	Walking
Walking uphill carrying a load	Walking uphill	Most housework
Swimming (fast, without stopping)	Gardening	Gentle swimming
Digging	Cleaning floors	
Playing basketball, football, tennis	Playing volleyball	
	Cycling	

Most people also notice that when they are regularly active, they feel better, stronger and are happier.

There is **no evidence** that doing a lot of exercise such as running is more healthy than walking or other activities (although vigorous exercise can help more with weight control).

Being fit means that you can walk and do moderate activities without being unwell or exhausted.

How often?

It is very important that any activity is regular. It is better to walk every day for ten minutes than to do a long walk once a year!

Ideally do some low-intensity activity every day for 20 minutes. For those who are able, a moderate or intense activity should be done twice a week also.

Knowing your limits

Exercising too much when you are not used to it can be dangerous. It is important not to do too much at once.

A good way of telling if you are exercising at the right level is looking at your breathing: You should be able to hold a normal conversation when exercising. If your breathing is too fast you will find it difficult to talk normally. Your breathing should just be slightly increased.

If you feel faint or dizzy, stop.

There is no basis for the 'no pain, no gain' theory (that it has to hurt to be good for you!).

If you are going to do a more intense exercise/activity it is a good idea to warm up and down. This means stretching the muscles you will be using, and starting and finishing gradually. This will help to prevent aching muscles the next day.

Starting out

If you have been inactive for some time, your body is not used to activity. It is important therefore to start off with just a small amount of activity and build up gradually.

Example: An overweight 40 year-old woman wants to improve her health. You could advise her to do the following:

Week one: Walk for ten minutes each morning.

Week two: Walk for fifteen minutes each morning and afternoon.

Week three: Walk for fifteen minutes each morning and afternoon and walk for 45 minutes at the weekend.

Week four: Walk for thirty minutes each day. At the weekends walk up a gentle hill.

And so on.

Form a new habit

Activity needs to be regular and maintained to be effective. This means that you need to get into the habit of doing regular activity – it really helps if you can find an enjoyable activity to do. It also helps if family or friends do this with you.

Examples:

- ✦ Walk to work or church – or get off the bus earlier and walk the last bit.
- ✦ Meet friends each day for a walk.
- ✦ Swim once a week with the family.
- ✦ Form a team to play football, volleyball or other games.
- ✦ Start a garden.

Drink plenty of water

If you are doing any activity in a warm environment, you will sweat. It is important to replace the water lost from the body by drinking plenty of water before, during and after any activity. You may have seen special sports drinks for sale or heard that you need extra salt if you are exercising intensely. You do not need extra salt or special drinks. Water and your normal diet are fine (only professional athletes who train for hours every day may sometimes need these).

