

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



Regular physical activity is a key part of a healthy lifestyle that improves both physical and mental health. When it comes to our physical health, an active lifestyle helps reduce and manage chronic disease risk factors, such as high blood pressure, cholesterol levels and obesity. According to the World Health Organization (2005), over 90% of type 2 diabetes and 80% of coronary heart disease could be avoided or delayed with regular physical activity, combined with a healthy diet, and avoidance of tobacco products. Additional physical health benefits of getting active include increased muscle and bone strength, which in turn can reduce the risk of fractures and bone diseases (osteoporosis and osteoarthritis). Physical activity is also an effective way of reducing the risk of falls among seniors, and helps maintain and promote long-term independence.

In addition, an active lifestyle can positively impact mental health by providing an overall sense of well-being and self-esteem. Being active can help lower the risk of developing depression and can be included in the treatment and management of depressive symptoms. People who are active are better able to handle stress and often feel more relaxed. An active lifestyle may also improve sleep – and who can't use better quality sleep?

Despite the many benefits of physical activity, more than half of all Canadians are inactive. If all Canadians were to become active, 21000 premature deaths would be avoided every year. This could result in an annual health savings of up to \$5 billion. Given the personal, social, and economic benefits of regular physical activity, it is highly important for all Canadians to become and stay physically active

## Finding Time

When people make physical activity a priority, they do find the time. Being active can include several shorter periods of physical activity to reach daily goals, rather than relying on a single longer session. This approach works well for busy people who have trouble setting aside larger blocks of time in the day.

There are several ways to find time in your day to be active. The morning is a good time to get active. You can fit activity into your day before any thing else can get in the way. Another option is to choose a physical activity that is fun to do with your family. Instead of watching a movie together, go for a bike ride or a hike and bring a healthy picnic.

## Finding More Energy

People often list limited energy as a barrier to getting and staying active, but any amount of activity makes a difference to your health. Even light and moderate physical activity can improve your health. An activity does not have to be non-stop, but the time needed to experience the benefits to your health depends on the amount of effort given to an activity. *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* recommends that adults get 30 up to 60 minutes of activity a day, most days of the week. You can start slowly to build your energy levels so that you can, in time, achieve this. Many people who become physically active say that physical activity helps them feel better and gives them more energy.

There are other types of activities that benefit groups that have limited energy. Older adults or those with limited mobility can maintain muscular strength, muscular endurance, and joint flexibility through regular physical activity. Resistance training and flexibility exercises performed at least twice a week can help maintain independence and enhance overall quality of life.

There are many common barriers that people believe hold them back from being physically active. The most common barriers are lack of time, limited energy, low motivation, lack of skill, and fear of injury. Some useful information on how to overcome these barriers and to become and stay physically active can be found on the next page.



## Getting Motivated

If it is challenging for you to get motivated, it is worth taking some time to think about what would motivate you to get active. Each person commits to being physically active for their own reasons. Health, appearance, enjoyment, meeting people, stress relief, learning a new skill, and personal satisfaction, are among the top reasons reported for participating in regular physical activity. Think about the benefits of physical activity that are important to you! You might just find something that works.

The support of others such as friends and co-workers is important in beginning and sticking with a physical activity program. For example, getting a walking partner or a friend to be physically active with you is a good way to stay on track. If you participate in a physical activity that you enjoy, you are more likely to stick with the program. You may also meet new people who like the same activity.



## Gaining Skills

Feeling that they don't have the skills to participate in an activity may hold some people back from getting active. The trick is to select an activity that you can do with enough skill that you enjoy it. Pick a physical activity that is fun and relatively easy to do like bike riding or hiking. In order to increase your enjoyment, it is wise to take a lesson or join a class if you are new to an activity. There are a variety of physical activities to choose from, including walking or gardening (low-intensity activities), or jogging or swimming (higher intensity activities). Other physical activities, such as weightlifting and yoga, may give you other benefits such as increased flexibility and muscle strength. With any of these, your skills will improve as you stick with the activity!

## Preventing Injury

When people have been inactive or are new to an activity there is sometimes a concern that they may injure themselves. A good practical prescription for being physically active is to start slowly (e.g., walking for 10 minutes) and to build up the time and intensity of an activity. It is important to build a foundation for being physically active to prevent an injury.

It is also important to wear the proper protective gear to help keep you from getting hurt. The gear you wear depends on the activity you do. For many activities there is no need to spend a lot of money on fancy equipment, but a small investment upfront can prevent later injury.

## Next Steps

Physical activity has been shown to reduce a wide range of diseases, to help manage several health problems, and to lead to improved quality of life. Although there may appear to be barriers to an active lifestyle, these can be overcome with the right mind-set, proper planning, and awareness of daily opportunities to engage in physical activity. Hopefully, the good feeling and good health that comes with getting active will keep you wanting to continue your healthy active lifestyle for a lifetime! **CS**

# WEBSITES

The Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA) encourages older Canadians to maintain and enhance their well-being through an active lifestyle. **[www.alcoa.ca](http://www.alcoa.ca)**

The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sports (CAAWS) works to achieve gender equity in the sport community. **[www.caaws.ca](http://www.caaws.ca)**

Go For Green's mission is to encourage outdoor physical activity that protects, enhances, or restores the environment. **[www.goforgreen.ca](http://www.goforgreen.ca)**

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