

Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke  
Scotland



# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



ESSENTIAL GUIDE

# This Essential Guide is about physical activity.

**It explains:**

- Why physical activity is important for your health
- How much physical activity you should aim for each week
- How to stay motivated and exercise safely

# What is physical activity?

Physical activity is any movement of your body that uses energy. It can be as simple as walking, gardening or shopping, or exercise like swimming, playing tennis or jogging.

Doing moderate physical activity on a regular basis can help reduce your risk of serious health problems such as heart disease, stroke and chest conditions.

Everyone can benefit from physical activity. It does not matter what age you are, your size, weight or ability to move around. You may feel that being active is difficult because of an existing health condition but any activity is better than none.

# Why is physical activity so important?

Being active every day can help to improve your physical and mental health.

Regular physical activity can help to:

- Make your heart stronger and work better
- Lower your blood pressure and cholesterol
- Improve your balance and coordination
- Maintain a healthy weight or lose weight if you need to
- Produce hormones that make you feel good
- Lower your stress levels and help you relax
- Reduce the effects of depression and anxiety

- Improve your breathing
- Reduce your risk of developing serious health conditions like heart disease, stroke and Type 2 diabetes
- Manage and improve health conditions you may already have



**People who do regular physical activity can reduce their risk of heart disease and stroke by up to 35%**

# How much physical activity should I do?

- Aim for at least **150 minutes** (2 ½ hours) of **moderate** physical activity a week. For example, 30 minutes on 5 or more days, or a few sessions each day of 10 minutes at a time.

**OR**

- You could do **75 minutes** of **vigorous** activity a week instead.

**Moderate activity** is activity that increases your breathing and heart rate. It makes you feel warm but you are still able to talk. For example, swimming, walking quickly, cycling.

**Vigorous activity** is activity that makes your breathing fast and talking difficult. For example, running, playing sport, hiking uphill.

You should also aim to **build strength** on **2 or more days a week**. Strength exercises help to keep your muscles, bones and joints strong. These include things like using weights, carrying your groceries or doing yoga.

If you are 65 or over, on 2 days a week, you should choose to do activities that also help with your balance and flexibility. Examples include bowls, tai chi, yoga or dancing.



# What physical activity should I do?



Whatever your level of ability and fitness, there are lots of different ways you can be physically active.



Think about when you want to do an activity and how it will fit into your daily routine.



Start gently and slowly build up the amount and intensity of activity you do.





Don't sit down for too long through your day. Try to move at least once an hour. For example, walk around when waiting for the kettle to boil and get up and move during TV advert breaks.

If you have difficulty moving or if you are in a wheelchair, speak to your nurse or doctor to find out about any exercise classes in your area that might be right for you.

# Tips for staying motivated



Try something new



Exercise with a friend or find out about a local gym or exercise group, such as a walking group



Try using a pedometer or an app to count your steps and the distance you've walked



Keep a diary to help stay focused and see your progress

Set small, realistic goals or targets



Celebrate achievements, no matter how small



Have rest days



Look for different signs of progress like how much energy you have or how much activity you are able to do



Remember that even if you don't see changes in the mirror, changes are taking place on the inside



# How to exercise safely

- Make sure you warm up and cool down before and after exercising
- Make sure you drink plenty of water before, during and after exercising
- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes
- Build up the pace gradually
- If you feel any pain, feel faint or feel very breathless, stop exercising immediately
- If you are (or have been) unwell, do a lower level of activity

It is important to pace yourself and don't overdo it. You should always stop doing any activity if you experience any pain or a lot of discomfort.

# Physical activity with a long-term health condition or after illness

If you have been diagnosed with a long-term health condition, physical activity is an important part of how you manage your condition and live well. If you have had an operation or been ill, physical activity can greatly help with your recovery.

In some cases, it may take time before you are able to become physically active again.

Speak to your doctor or nurse about what physical activity is right for you.

# What physical activity is right for me?

Talk to your doctor, nurse or specialist about what physical activity is right for you. You may need to adapt some activities or try new ones. The following questions may be helpful to ask:

**How much physical activity should I do each day/week?**

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**What type of activity should I do?**

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**Is there anything I should avoid?**

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**Will my medication affect what I can do?  
Should I take it before or after activity?**

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**What warning signs should I look out for  
when I am being active?**

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For free, confidential advice and support from our **Advice Line nurses**, call: 0808 801 0899 (Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm), text: NURSE to 66777 or email: [adviceline@chss.org.uk](mailto:adviceline@chss.org.uk).

Across Scotland, over one million people – that's one in five of us – are living with the effects of a chest, heart or stroke condition. We are here to help everyone who needs us. But we need your support to do this. Go to [www.chss.org.uk/supportus](http://www.chss.org.uk/supportus) to find out how you can help more people in Scotland.

**If you would like this resource in an alternative format, please contact our Advice Line nurses.**

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**E5**

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