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.

Taking part in 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
- Control your cholesterol levels
- 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 **30 minutes** of moderate physical activity on **5 or more days a week**. This could be 30 minutes in one go or 3 short sessions 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.

**Vigorous activity** is activity that makes your breathing fast and talking difficult.
You should also aim to do **strength exercises** 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 you may be at greater risk of falls. If so, you should also do activities to help with your balance and coordination, for example, 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.

Call our Advice Line FREE on 0808 801 0899
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, take the stairs instead of the lift 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

Call our Advice Line FREE on 0808 801 0899
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 after illness or with a long-term health condition

If you have been diagnosed with a long-term health condition or you have had an operation or been ill, physical activity is an important part of how you manage your health and live well. In some cases, it may take time before you are able to become physically active again.
What physical activity is right for me?

Talk to your GP, nurse or specialist about what physical activity is right for you. You may need to adapt some activities or try new ones. You may want to ask your GP, nurse or specialist the following questions.

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

What type of activity should I do?
Is there anything I should avoid?

Will my medication affect what I can and can’t do? Should I take it before or after physical activity?

What warning signs should I look out for when I am being active?
We hope this information has been useful to you. Our publications are available free to anyone in Scotland who needs them. For other resources and Essential Guides in this series go to [www.chss.org.uk](http://www.chss.org.uk)

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line nurses also offer free, confidential advice and support. Call: 0808 801 0899 (free, Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm), email: adviceline@chss.org.uk or text: NURSE to 66777

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. Find out how you can help more people in Scotland at [www.chss.org.uk/supportus](http://www.chss.org.uk/supportus)