

**Being active can help you live a healthier, longer life. There are lots of different ways you can be more active, even if you find it difficult to move around. This factsheet explains why physical activity is so important and suggests activities and resources that can help you to get moving.**

Physical activity is any movement of the body that uses energy and can be as simple as walking, housework or gardening. Regular physical activity can help reduce your risk of serious health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, respiratory illness and early death.

You can benefit from being more active whatever your age, size or physical condition. 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 important?**

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

Regular physical activity can help to:

- Reduce the risk of diseases including heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes
- Manage existing health conditions such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and stroke
- Lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Maintain a healthy weight or help you to lose weight if you need to
- Strengthen your heart and improve your breathing
- Increase your energy levels
- Improve concentration, mood and self esteem
- Improve balance and co-ordination
- Maintain your independence

***‘There’s no doubt that exercising will make you healthier and increasing your activity even by a small amount can improve your sense of well-being and help you live better with a long-term condition. Also, getting fit can be fun!’***

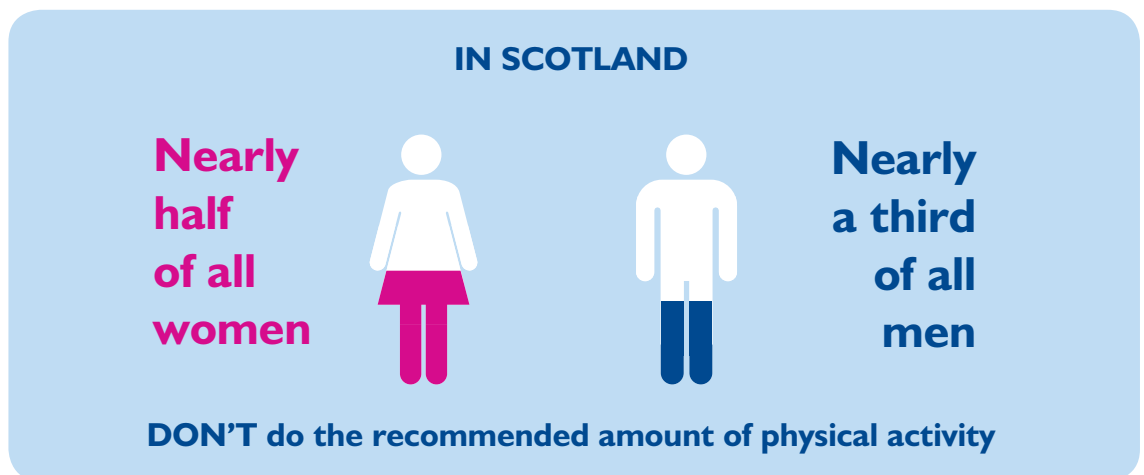
**Gordon, Cardiac Group Member**

FACTSHEET

## How much physical activity should I do?

Current guidelines recommend that adults should try to be active every day to stay healthy. Over the course of a week, you should aim to do 150 minutes (2 and a half hours) of **moderate** activity. This can be broken down in to manageable amounts of time to suit you. Just ten minutes at a time on a regular basis can provide physical and health benefits. It is important to start gradually and slowly build up the amount of activity you do.

'Moderate' activity means being slightly breathless but still able to hold a conversation; for example, a brisk walk would normally be classed as 'moderate' activity.



## Where do I start?

It's never too late to start becoming more active.

When deciding what type of exercise you choose make sure you pick something that you are interested in and will enjoy doing. You will then be much more likely to stick to it. Think about how you will find the time to do it and how you can build it into your routine. You may also want to think about whether you would prefer to exercise with others or do it alone.

## How to stay safe while being active

- Warm up before you start as this can help prevent injury
- Build the pace up gradually and slow down gradually rather than just stopping suddenly
- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes
- Stay hydrated by drinking water before, during and after activity
- Do some stretching exercises before and after your activity

## What sort of activity should I do?



Choose an activity that makes you move enough to make you feel warm and a little out of breath but you are still able to have a conversation. This is called moderate activity and includes things like walking, gardening, cycling or swimming.



Vigorous activity includes things like running, aerobics, and sports such as tennis or football. It can also include hiking uphill or riding a bike fast or uphill. During activities like this, it will be harder to keep up a conversation. For most people, to do an activity like this would require some training and may not be appropriate if you already have a chest or heart condition.



Your weekly activity should also include muscle strengthening activity at least two days a week to keep your muscles, bones and joints strong. This would include activity such as exercising with weights, yoga or tai chi, gardening or simply carrying your shopping.



People at risk of falls can also benefit from activity that helps improve balance such as dancing, bowling or tai chi.

If your mobility has been affected and you use a wheelchair, there are chair-based exercises that you can do. These involve a series of seated stretches and movements to increase your heart rate and exercise your muscles and joints. Wiggling your feet or making circles with your ankles regularly can be a good way of seated exercise and can help your lower-body circulation. There may also be chair-based exercise classes held at local leisure centres or community centres in your area that you could join.

Call the CHSS Advice Line nurses on 0808 801 0899 for details of organisations and resources for chair-based exercises or other local classes that can help you increase your physical activity.

## Reduce your sitting time

If you have a long-term health condition, you might find being active difficult. However, there are still things you can do to help yourself. One of the things that all of us should do is to reduce the amount of time spent sitting for a long time. This can be done by reducing time spent watching



TV or using a computer, or by breaking up time spent sitting down by standing up and walking every so often. For example, stand up during the advert breaks on TV, get off the bus a stop earlier than you usually would, or park a couple of streets further away.

## What can help me to stay motivated?

The most important thing is to do something you enjoy which you can fit in to your daily routine.

### Tips for staying motivated

- Try something new
- Exercise with a friend or find out about a local group in your area
- Try using a pedometer or an app that counts the number of steps you take and the distance you've walked
- Keep a personal diary so that you can stay focused and see your progress more clearly
- Set yourself goals

### Setting goals

Setting goals will help keep you focused and motivated by giving you something to aim for. Set yourself realistic goals and give yourself a timescale in which to achieve these goals. For example, set a goal to walk 20-30 minutes three times a week. Once you have reached that goal you can think about the next one. A longer term goal might be to take part in an event such as a charity walk.

Be realistic about what you can and can't do. Make sure you have a back-up plan. For example, think about what you will do if it is raining and you were planning to walk. Is there an indoor activity you could do instead or do you need to make sure you have wet-weather clothes with you?

Reward yourself for all your hard work by recognising when you have achieved your goals. Think of things that you could reward yourself with such as a massage, a new pair of trainers, a trip to the cinema or day trip out.

## Is there any exercise I shouldn't do?

You shouldn't do physical activity if you feel unwell or have a high temperature. Also if you have a long-term health condition, speak to your doctor before you start any form of exercise so that they can ensure that it is safe for you to do and it won't affect any ongoing treatment. Some forms of physical activity may not be appropriate for people with certain conditions; for example, contact sports for people with an implanted device. Often the solution is to choose another form of activity.



### Exercising with a long-term chest condition

It can be tempting to avoid exercise if you have a long-term chest condition because you may think it will make you breathless or make your chest worse. However, it has been shown that regular exercise will give you better control of your breathing as well as help your general fitness levels. If you use a reliever inhaler always have it with you when exercising. It is important not to be more than moderately breathless.



### Exercising if you have heart condition

If you have an existing heart condition or have experienced a heart attack, you should avoid activity that requires you to hold your breath or requires sudden bursts of energy such as push-ups or sit-ups. It is also important to take time to warm up before exercise and cool down afterwards to allow your heart rate to build up gradually and return to normal gradually.



### Exercise after stroke

Regular exercise can reduce your risk of stroke by a quarter. If you have recently had a stroke, you may not be able to be more active straight away but when you feel ready, talk to your doctor or therapist about what is right for you. Depending how your stroke has affected you, you may need to adapt your activities or try new ones. Exercise can help with your overall recovery and is an important part of your rehabilitation after a stroke.

**It is important to pace yourself and not overdo it. You should always stop if you experience pain or severe discomfort.**

## Where can I find help?

Below are some organisations and resources that can help you find ways to get more active. Find out about exercise-based support groups near you such as the CHSS affiliated support groups by visiting [www.chss.org.uk/groups](http://www.chss.org.uk/groups) or call the CHSS Advice Line nurses on 0808 801 0899. Your local leisure centre and council will also have details of activity programmes and classes for all ages and fitness levels.

If exercise classes are not for you, you might find that individualised exercise programmes taught by appropriate professionals might work better. There are also plenty of exercise DVDs available which include all levels of ability as well as chair-based programmes.

## Other organisations and resources that can help:

- **Paths for all (Scotland)** [www.pathsforall.gov.uk](http://www.pathsforall.gov.uk)
- **Ramblers** [www.ramblers.org.uk/scotland](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/scotland)
- **Extend** [www.extend.org.uk](http://www.extend.org.uk)
- **NHS Choices** [www.nhs.uk/livewell](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell)
- **Scottish Disability Sport** [www.scottishdisabilitysport.com](http://www.scottishdisabilitysport.com)
- **Active Scotland** [www.activescotland.org.uk](http://www.activescotland.org.uk)
- **ALISS** [www.aliss.org](http://www.aliss.org)
- **Take Life On** [www.takelifeon.co.uk](http://www.takelifeon.co.uk)
- **Jog Scotland** [www.jogscotland.co.uk](http://www.jogscotland.co.uk)
- **Age UK** [www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland)
- **World Walking** [www.worldwalking.org](http://www.worldwalking.org)

## Useful fitness apps

There are a number of smart phone apps available, many of which are free, that can help you achieve your fitness goals. Below are some of the more popular options.



- **My Fitness Pal** [www.myfitnesspal.com](http://www.myfitnesspal.com)



- **Fitness Tracker** [www.fitness-tracker.com](http://www.fitness-tracker.com)



- **Fitocracy** [www.fitocracy.com](http://www.fitocracy.com)

**NHS Choices** ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) has a range of suggestions, including getting-started videos, strength and flex videos, exercises for older people and fitness apps.

If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence,  
please call the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line nurses

**0808 801 0899**

free to call from landlines and mobiles.