

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Chest
Heart &
Stroke
Scotland



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.

For some people it will be important to speak to your doctor or physiotherapist so they can tailor an exercise plan to your individual health needs. This is especially helpful if you've been diagnosed with a new condition, have concerns you haven't previously discussed, or if your long-term symptoms have changed.



What is physical activity?

Physical activity is **any movement of your body that uses energy**. This might mean going to a gym or doing exercise classes. It can also be as simple as walking, gardening, shopping, or doing chores.

Taking part in moderate physical activity (i.e. activity that increases your heart rate) on a regular basis can help to reduce your risk of serious health problems. This includes, heart disease, stroke, and chest conditions.

Everyone can benefit from physical activity.

It does not matter what age you are, your size, your weight, or your ability to move around.

Being active may be difficult because of an existing health condition, but any activity is better than none.

Why is physical activity so important?

Regular physical activity is an important factor in your health and wellbeing.

Exercising every day (if you are able) can help you to:



Make your heart stronger.



Lower your blood pressure.



Control your cholesterol levels.



Improve your strength, balance, and coordination.



Reach and maintain a healthy weight.



Produce hormones that improve your mood.



Lower your stress levels, helping you relax.



Reduce the effects of depression and anxiety.



Improve or better control your breathing.



Reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke by up to 35%.



Reduce your risk of Type 2 diabetes.

Types of physical activity

Moderate activity

Moderate activity is anything that increases your breathing and heart rate. It makes you warm, but you are still able to talk.

Vigorous activity

Vigorous activity is anything that makes your breathing fast and talking difficult. If you do vigorous activity, you should be able to feel that it is making you tired.

Strength exercises

Strength exercises help to keep your muscles, bones, and joints strong. This includes activities like lifting or carrying weights, but also stretching and strengthening exercises like yoga or pilates.

How much physical activity should I do?

- The World Health Organisation suggests you 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

- At least **75 minutes of vigorous activity** in a week.

You should also aim to do **strength exercises** on **2 or more days a week**.

If you are 65 or over, you may be at greater risk of falls. Some activities can reduce this risk by helping your balance and coordination, for example: tai chi, yoga, or dancing.

It is okay if you cannot do this much. Any physical activity is good!

What physical activity should I do?



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



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



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



Don't overdo it. If you start to feel pain or take a long time to recover after periods of activity, consider reducing your level of activity.



Don't sit down for too long throughout your day. Try to move around at least once an hour. For example, walk around while waiting for the kettle to boil, take the stairs instead of a lift if you can, or do exercises 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 exercise classes in your area that might suit your needs.

You can find guidance on exercise for your age and health at www.gov.uk/government/collections/physical-activity-guidelines



Tips for staying motivated



Try something new.



Look for activities that you enjoy and that don't feel like a chore.



Vary the kinds of exercise you do, and try to build exercise into your daily activities.



Exercise with a friend or a group, such as a walking group or local gym membership.



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, and achievable goals or targets.



Celebrate achievements, no matter how small.



Have rest days.



Look for different signs of progress such as 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, the important changes are still taking place on the inside.

How to exercise safely

- Make sure you warm up before exercising and cool down after exercising.
- Drink plenty of water before, during, and after exercising.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothes and comfortable shoes.
- Build up the pace gradually.
- If you feel any pain, feel faint, or feel very breathless, **stop exercising immediately.**
- If you have recently been unwell, lower your level of activity.

It is important to pace yourself, and not overdo it. You should always stop an activity if you experience any unusual level of pain or discomfort.

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

Physical activity is an important part of how you manage your health. This is especially true if you have been diagnosed with a long-term health condition, have had an operation, or have been ill.

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

If you are concerned about your ability to do physical activity, talk to your healthcare professional about what activities may be suitable.

Long Covid may make it difficult to exercise. However, doing physical activity is still important. **Find out more information in our Safe Exercise with Long Covid factsheet.**

Finding support

If you are unsure what exercise is safe for you, or you're finding it hard to build activity into your routine, support is available.

This might mean speaking to friends, family, or people in your community to see what works for them. You could also ask them to be with you when exercising.

It might mean having a discussion with your health team, physiotherapist, or occupational therapist about ways to adapt exercises to make them safe.

You can also get support from the people who run classes or work at sports centres. They will often know what is available in your community and how you can access exercise that works for you.

Some ways to build exercise into your routine:

- Consider walking or cycling to places you need to go, if this is safe for you.
- Go on short walks or excursions during your lunch break.
- Try to do stretches or otherwise move around at least once every hour or two.
- Meet friends outside, and “walk and talk”.
- Use a pedometer or a smart watch to track your exercise. This can make you more aware of times when you could be exercising, as well as warning you when you are pushing yourself too hard.
- Signing up for a regular class or exercise slot can encourage you to actually do the exercise.
- Try several sports or exercises to find what you enjoy.

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For free, confidential advice and support from our Advice Line Team, contact:

0808 801 0899 (Mon-Fri 9am-4pm)

text ADVICE to 66777

advice@chss.org.uk

One in five people in Scotland are affected by chest, heart and stroke conditions or Long Covid. Go to www.chss.org.uk/supportus to find out how you can help us support more people in Scotland.

To give feedback or request alternative formats, email: health.information@chss.org.uk

**Chest
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