



**Physical activity  
for weight loss**



## How does physical activity help you lose weight?

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Physical activity is a crucial tool in helping to burn calories

- to reduce weight effectively it is important that the amount of energy you use up during your daily activities (your energy expenditure) is greater than the amount of energy you take in (the food you eat)
  - physical activity is a crucial tool in helping increase energy expenditure (burn calories) and can help use up stored fat
  - physical activity also helps build muscle which speeds up your metabolic rate. This increases the amount of calories you burn even when you are not exercising
  - reducing the fat around your stomach will help reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure and diabetes and having a heart attack or stroke
  - in terms of weight loss, several short bouts of activity (eg, 3 x 10 minutes) is as effective as 30 continuous minutes
  - physical activity also helps reduce high blood cholesterol levels
  - physical activity, along with a healthy diet, helps reduce stress, improves your overall feeling of well-being and quality of life and helps you to sleep well
  - it also reduces the risk of bowel cancer, osteoporosis and the risk of falling.
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## What type of activity is best?

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While stamina-based activity is particularly important for health, you also need to include some strength and flexibility-based activity to get the best health gains.

### Stamina-type activities:

Walking, swimming, cycling, tennis, dancing and housework (washing floors or windows)

### Strength-type activities:

Walking uphill, carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (digging or mowing) and housework (hoovering)

### Flexibility-type activities:

Swimming, dancing, yoga, Pilates, T'ai Chi and gardening (weeding)

### Tips on increasing your activity level:

- walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. Perhaps take a dog for a walk to make it more interesting
- look for opportunities to be active during your whole day. For example park at the far end of the car park, or walk one stop further to catch the bus, and take 10 minutes out of your lunch break to go for a walk
- try using the stairs instead of the escalator. Start by walking part of the way up the escalator and gradually progress to walking up the whole way
- choose activities that you enjoy doing. Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable.



Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable

## How much and how often?

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- your main aim is to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week. If this seems too much to start with, try starting with 3 x 10 minute walks spread throughout the day and work towards 2 x 15 minute walks and then 30 continuous minutes. One goal is to try and increase your activity by 2 minutes each day
  - moderate intensity activity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time
  - set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off
  - try to avoid sitting still for more than 20 minutes
  - whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity for the first 10 minutes of exercise. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. After this time, you should have reached the level of intensity which you can maintain for your chosen period of activity. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually.
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## Staying safe

- if you do not know how much physical activity you can do safely or you have other medical concerns such as arthritis, ask your GP or practice nurse for advice
- make sure you start slowly and build up to the recommended levels. Avoid high intensity, high impact activities, for example jumping up and down. This puts unnecessary stress on your joints
- wear appropriate and comfortable footwear.

If you get any of the following problems, speak to your GP or contact NHS Direct:

- discomfort in your chest or upper body brought on by physical activity
- uncomfortable or severe breathlessness during activity
- dizziness or nausea on exertion
- fainting during or just after doing physical activity
- palpitation (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.

## The balance of good health

What's included	Food groups	How much and what types
Bread, other cereals and potatoes	Other cereals include breakfast cereals, pasta, rice, oats, noodles, and cornmeal	Eat plenty of these foods, including some at every meal. Choose wholegrain, brown or high fibre kinds whenever you can
Fruit and vegetables	Fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables dried fruit and fresh fruit juice	Eat plenty of these foods and choose as wide a variety as you can
Dairy foods	Milk, cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais	Eat moderate amounts of these foods. Choose lower fat alternatives when possible
Meat, fish and alternatives	Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, beans and pulses	Eat moderate amounts of these foods, choosing lower fat alternatives whenever you can
Foods containing fat or sugar	Margarine, butter, low-fat spread, cooking oils, salad dressings, cream, crisps, biscuits and sugar	Eat these foods in small amounts or not very often

## Be active – be safe – have fun

### For more information:

The British Heart Foundation also produces other educational materials which may be of interest. To find out about these or to order your Publications and Videos catalogue please go to our website or call our orderline number listed below.

NHS Direct: **0845 4647** or Website: **www.nhsdirect.co.uk**

Other leaflets in this series which can be ordered by health professionals include:

Physical activity and angina (G98)

Physical activity after a heart attack (G100)

Physical activity and high blood pressure (G101)

Physical activity and diabetes (G102)

Re-order line for health professionals: **0870 600 6566**

**Important: This leaflet is not a substitute for the advice your doctor may give you based on his or her knowledge of your condition.**

### British Heart Foundation

14 Fitzhardinge Street

London W1H 6DH

Phone: 020 7935 0185

Fax: 020 7486 5820

Website: [bhf.org.uk](http://bhf.org.uk)

### Heart Information Line

08450 70 80 70

(a local rate number)

A helpline service for the public and health

professionals providing information on a wide range of issues relating to heart health.

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