

# Moving More

SELF-CARE FORUM FACT SHEET NO. 27

## Why staying active is so important

**Being physically active can help you lead a healthier, happier and longer life.**

It's better than medicine and it is free.

- It will make you feel better, boost your self-esteem, your mood
- It improves your sleep, increases your energy and reduces stress risk.
- It reduces your risks of lots of serious health conditions:
  - Heart disease and stroke
  - Diabetes
  - Bowel and breast cancers
  - Early death (before age 75)
  - Osteoarthritis
  - Falls & hip fractures
  - Depression
  - Dementia

**Aim for:**

**150**  
minutes  
moderate intensity  
a week  
If you can talk but can't sing, it's moderate



OR

**75**  
minutes  
vigorous intensity  
a week  
If you can't sing or talk, it's vigorous



**Reduce inactive time**

Break up periods of inactivity

Less:



More:



## How much should I do?

**Get up and be active every day.**

- Every minute counts – regular small amounts are a great place to start - you don't have to run marathons.

- **Everyone should aim for at least:**

**150 minutes of moderate activity a week**

**75 minutes of vigorous activity a week**

**Or a mixture of both**

You should spread exercise evenly over the week

e.g. moderate activity for 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.

- Avoid sitting or lying down for long during the day. Get up and move.

- **Do strengthening exercises 2 days a week** to keep your bones and muscles strong. They should work all the major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, tummy, chest, shoulders and arms). Fitter people can also do short sessions of very vigorous activity (called high intensity interval training or HIIT).

- **People over age 65** should do at least light activity every day and do exercises at least 2 days a week that improve balance and flexibility to reduce the risk of falls as well as strengthening exercises. Light activity is moving rather than sitting or lying down. It will help make you stronger and feel more confident on your feet. See page 2.

## Moderate activity

**Moderate intensity activity** will raise your heart rate, make you breathe faster and feel warmer.

- If you can still talk, but not sing, it's moderate.
- Most moderate activities can become vigorous if you increase your effort.
- Here are some examples:
  - Walking for health
  - Aerobics
  - Riding a bike
  - Pushing a lawn mower
  - Hiking
  - Moderate intensity pilates and yoga

## Vigorous activity

**Vigorous intensity activity** makes you breathe hard and fast.

- If you can't say more than a few words without pausing for breath, it's vigorous.
- Here are some examples:
  - Running
  - Aerobics
  - Swimming
  - Riding a bike fast or on hills
  - Football
  - Hiking uphill
  - Dance for fitness
  - Martial arts

## Strengthening exercises

- You should do the activities until you need a short rest before repeating them.
- You don't have to join a gym!
- The strengthening exercises below may not be counted as moderate or vigorous so you may need to do them as well as your regular exercise - you can do them on the same or different days – whatever's best for you.
- Here are some examples:
  - Carrying heavy shopping bags
  - Yoga
  - Pilates
  - Tai chi
  - Wheeling a wheelchair
  - Working with resistance bands
  - Lifting and carrying children
  - Heavy gardening, e.g. digging and shovelling
  - Doing exercises that use your own body weight, e.g. push-ups and sit-ups or plank exercises

**Build strength**  
on at least **2** days a week  
to keep muscles, bones & joints strong



## Where to start

### Try to do some physical activity every day.

- Start gradually - don't do a lot of exercise at first, however keen and excited you might feel. It will tire you out and you may injure yourself.
- Aim for something that feels right for you. Take into account your recent activity levels and any medical conditions you have. Don't be put off by them – 1 out of every 5 young adults (aged 16–34) already have 5 or more health problems. By the time people turn 50, it's about 1 in 2. Many of these conditions will be prevented or improved by exercise.
- Speak to your GP (family doctor) first if:
  - you have not exercised for several months
  - you have a health problem or are worried about your health
- You can do moderate exercise (medium) or you can do vigorous (hard) exercise or bit of both.
- Brisk walking is a great place to start - it's free and doesn't need any special clothing or equipment.
- Try to walk fast for 20 minutes every day, or 30 minutes a day on 5 days each week

## If you have a smartphone

If you have a smartphone, you don't need to buy anything extra.

- Some phones come with a built-in step tracker.
- Others let you download a free app to track your steps.
- Just keep your phone with you—ideally in a pocket near your hips—and it will count your steps from the moment you start your day.

## If you don't have a smartphone

- It's easy to do without technology to help. If you don't have a smartphone or a smartwatch, you could use an ordinary watch to count the minutes of your activity or steps.
- You don't need any equipment, but if you'd like to use something, you could buy a cheap pedometer (a machine that you wear that counts how many steps you take).
- The cheapest fitness watches to track steps and speed start at around £7. You don't need anything fancier.

## Using technology to help

- Even a cheap £7 smartwatch will allow you to store your daily steps and minutes of exercise. Some can prompt you to exercise, tell you how many brisk minutes you have done each day and record it for you.
- The NHS 'Couch to 5k' is a great app to start – over 9 weeks it will take you from no exercise to being able to run for 30 minutes. There are great encouraging recordings to help you, including comedians Sarah Millican and Sanjeev Kohli and presenter Jo Whaley.
- The free NHS app 'Active 10' is a great way to track your daily 'brisk' minutes.



## Activity in the real world

- Ever plan to work out... and then totally skip it? You're not alone. It's what's called the "intention–action gap" - knowing what you should do, but not actually doing it.

### A few smart nudges turn "I'll do it" into "I did it":

- **Buddy up or sign up** – a class or workout partner keeps you honest.
- **Set reminders** – apps, calendar alerts, or texts help you remember (and actually show up).
- **Make a routine** - same time, same place, every week/day, don't think about it - just do it.
- **Make it obvious** – trainers by the door, water on your desk, little cues that make healthy choices the easy choice.
- No need for superhuman willpower. Just tweak your environment so the right thing feels natural.

## Keeping track of your activity

- The NHS says it's best to count how many minutes you exercise each day, because that's what science shows works best. But counting your steps each day can help too.
- **Minutes of exercise** only measures the time you spend on different types of exercise, not the rest of your daily activities.
- **Steps** includes every step you take during the day from the moment you get up, not just during exercise. It is measuring all your daily physical activity even when you are not exercising.
- The most recent evidence suggests that you should aim to get to 7,000 steps a day as part of your day to day activity. You might find you already do around 1,600 steps a day in your everyday life.
- Even increasing from 2,000 to 4,000 steps a day will help. It's not exact, but 20 minutes of moderate activity could do this.

## Light activity

### People over age 65 should do at least light activity every day

- Here are some examples:
  - Getting up to make a cup of tea
  - Moving around your home
  - Cleaning and dusting
  - Making the bed
  - Walking slowly
  - Vacuuming
  - Standing up
- Try standing on one leg, for example while brushing your teeth, to help improve balance

## Where to find out more

- **Visit the NHS website exercise pages.** It includes all the information you need including videos and downloadable information: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/>
- **Join your local parkrun.** It's a free, community event where you can walk, jog, run, volunteer or just watch. It takes place every Saturday morning. There is no time limit and no one finishes last. Everyone is welcome. <https://www.parkrun.org.uk/>