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Get active!



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Introduction

The convenience of modern life is making us increasingly inactive and this is proving hazardous to our health. For example, inactive people have twice the risk of developing coronary heart disease compared with active people. Inactivity increases the risk of coronary heart disease as much as smoking does.

Inactivity is a serious health problem especially as we know that 7 in every 10 women and 6 in 10 men in the UK are not active enough to achieve health benefits.



What does it mean to be more active?

Being physically active might involve going swimming, doing an exercise class or playing a sport, but it also includes everyday things such as walking, gardening and climbing stairs. You can get the benefits of being more active from all types of physical activity, not just from formal 'exercise'.



Our bodies were made to move!

Why should I be more active?

Being active will make a difference to your quality of life. Once you start, the benefits will become obvious. You'll experience:

- Better health
- More energy – you'll be able to cope with your daily routine and have energy to spare
- Reduced stress – you'll relax more easily and feel better about yourself
- Stronger bones and muscles
- Better balance, strength, suppleness and mobility
- More independence in later life – you'll be able to cope with daily tasks more easily
- Improved sleep
- Better maintenance of a healthy weight
- More social opportunities – you'll meet other people who enjoy being active
- A sense of achievement
- Increased enjoyment – activity can be fun and it's something you could do as a family.

Physical activity improves both your physical and mental health. It is one of the most important factors in maintaining a good quality of life.

The heart is a muscle, but it's the most important muscle we've got, and it needs exercise to keep fit so that it can pump blood efficiently with each heart beat.

Health problem	How activity can help
Coronary heart disease and stroke	Inactivity is one of the major causes of coronary heart disease and stroke in Britain. People who are inactive have twice the risk of developing coronary heart disease compared with active people. Regular activity slows down the narrowing of the arteries to the heart and brain that occurs with age. The more exercise you do, the stronger and more efficient the heart becomes so it can pump more blood with each beat.
High blood pressure	Physical activity can help to reduce high blood pressure. It also reduces the likelihood of developing it in the first place. If you have high blood pressure, avoid certain 'weight-bearing' activities such as lifting weights in a gym.
Stress, anxiety and depression	Being active has been shown to help with each of these. It is a great means of letting off steam and will leave you feeling revitalised and relaxed.
Overweight and obesity	Regular physical activity is crucial to preventing obesity and in helping people to lose weight. Activity encourages the body to use up excess stored fat. Remember that losing weight involves both eating healthily and increasing the amount of exercise you do.
Type 2 diabetes	Activity helps you to maintain normal blood glucose levels. Regular activity helps in the prevention and management of diabetes.
Osteoporosis (thinning of the bones)	Most physical activities improve balance and muscle strength, which reduces the risk of falling. Any weight-bearing activity (such as stair climbing and walking) will strengthen bones and reduce the risk of fracture.
Certain cancers	Some forms of cancer are less likely to occur in people who are physically active.
Abnormal blood cholesterol levels (cholesterol is a fatty substance mainly made in the body by the liver).	Physical activity helps to improve your cholesterol levels by increasing the level of more protective high density lipoprotein (HDL) in the blood.

If you are already regularly active, you can still benefit by adding more activity. Generally, the more active you are, the more benefits you will get.

Who can benefit from being more active?



Everyone can benefit – whatever your age, size or physical condition. Just remember that you are never too old or too unfit to start doing something. In fact, the greatest increase in health benefit comes to inactive people who start to take regular moderate physical activity. Your health risks will decrease as soon as you start to do more.

How much do you do already?

How many days of the week do you do something active? (think about activities both at work and in your leisure time). When you are physically active, how much time do you put into it? (add up all the minutes from all activities). Read on to find out just how much you need to do to ensure health benefits and improve the quality of your life.



How much activity should I be doing?



Any increase in activity will benefit your health but experts agree that all adults should aim to build up to at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on 5 or more days of the week.

Your health risks will decrease as soon as you start to do more.

What does moderate intensity mean?

It means working hard enough to be breathing more heavily than normal and becoming slightly warmer, but not so hard that you are unable to talk and exercise at the same time.

If 30 minutes all at once seems too much for you at the moment:

- Start with 5 minutes at least three times a day.
- Gradually build up the time and frequency until 30 minutes feels easier. Once 30 minutes is easy try working harder. If you were following a walking programme you could do this by walking more quickly or walking uphill. As you get fitter you will be able to do more and more. Remember that regular moderate activity is better than occasional, vigorous bursts.



30 minutes of moderate physical activity on 5 or more days of the week.

Start slowly at a level that suits you.

Gradually build up the frequency, intensity and duration.

Choose a variety of activities and ones you enjoy.

Try to do something every day.

What sorts of activity should I be doing?

Try to aim for a variety because different activities have different benefits. But to get started you may find it easier to have a specific goal such as to get fitter, or become stronger. Choose activities that help you achieve your goal.

If you want to improve the health of your heart and circulation, you need to do endurance-type activities such as brisk walking, gardening, cycling, swimming, dancing, jogging or tennis. Endurance activities are sometimes called aerobic or cardiovascular activities. As well as strengthening your heart they use up calories, helping with weight control.

Other activities are good for improving flexibility and mobility. Keeping your body supple and flexible will help you keep a full range of movement and stay independent as you get older. Try anything that involves gentle reaching, bending and stretching of muscle groups – for example, gardening, housework such as

hoovering, T'ai Chi, golf, bowls, yoga or dance, pilates, and power walking.

Strengthen your muscles and bones with strength-type activities. These will help give you good balance, good posture and bone strength which are essential to protect you against conditions such as osteoporosis, and reduce your risk of falling. Improved muscle tone can also help you to gain better shape and improve the way you look and feel. Stronger, larger muscles also use up more calories so can help you keep to a healthy weight. It is important to use a variety of muscle groups to ensure good overall strength. Examples of strength exercises include climbing stairs, digging the garden, carrying shopping or young children, weight-training and walking uphill.

Some activities help to deliver more than one benefit. For example walking briskly is good for endurance but it also helps to strengthen bones and muscles.



If you want to improve the health of your heart and circulation, you need to do endurance-type activities.

Activity	Endurance (aerobic)	Flexibility and mobility	Strength
Bowls		✓	
Brisk walking	✓		✓
Climbing stairs	✓		✓
Cycling	✓		
Dancing	✓	✓	
Digging the garden	✓		✓
Pilates		✓	✓
Swimming	✓	✓	
T'ai Chi		✓	✓
Weight training			✓
Yoga		✓	✓



Improved muscle tone can also help you to gain better shape and improve the way you look and feel.

How to get started

Getting started is easier than you think.

Changing a few of your daily habits can soon add up to a more active lifestyle. Remember that every little counts!

Consider some of the following 'triggers' and decide if you are able to make changes in these areas.

- Make activity part of your social life – walk to the cinema or pub, walk round to see friends, or find a work mate or neighbour who wants to get out more and do something active together.
- Be active as often as possible – even if it is only for 5 minutes.
- Walk more each day – add a number of shorter, brisk walks into your day as part of your daily routine. You could walk your children to school and back each day or walk, rather than drive, to the post-box or the local shops. Or, work out a convenient time to walk each day and make it a habit. Going out for a walk in your lunch hour is something you can do even in winter when the nights are short. Try a number of different routes for variety.

- Climb stairs more often – look for every opportunity to use the stairs instead of the lift or escalator, or walk up the escalator.
- Avoid sitting for long periods – break up sitting periods at least every 30 minutes. For example, when watching TV, get up in between programmes or during adverts.
- Do more activity during your leisure time – for example on days off and at weekends.
- Work some activity into your daily journeys. Walk or cycle part of the journey to work or to the shops.
- Why not arrange with a friend to exercise together on a regular basis? Keeping each other company will keep you both motivated.
- Physical activity can be a family thing, a social thing or something you do on your own. You can try an organised activity, be active around the house or take a walk in the park. The first step towards becoming more active is the most important one.

So what's stopping you?

If you find it easy to list the things that stop you from being active, read on.

'I don't have the time'

Try reaching the 30 minute target in bouts throughout the day. This should make it easier to fit into your existing routine as you don't need to set aside 'special time'. Take the stairs instead of the lift or escalator. Walk a bit more of the journey to work or try walking at a brisker pace. You still have 23 hours and 30 minutes of the day left!

'I'm not the sporty type'

Lots of people enjoy taking part in sports but you don't need to be good at sports or 'sporty' to lead an active life. There are many activities like walking, gardening and dancing that are not 'sporty' but still contribute towards the benefits of an active life.

'I'm too fat'

Perhaps you feel it would be embarrassing to go to a sports centre or exercise class but you could start gradually with everyday activities such as walking, climbing stairs and gardening. As you become fitter you will be able to work a bit harder for a bit longer and you may find that you begin to lose weight and gain the confidence to try other things.

'I'm too tired at the end of the day'

If you find that you are very tired, check with your doctor that there's no physical reason for this. Look for opportunities to be active during the day – for example, climbing stairs, taking a brisk walk at lunchtime, or parking further away. People often say that as they begin to do more they feel less tired and more energetic.



'I'm looking after young children'

Children benefit from being active too, and lots of them are not doing enough. Try doing things together that keep you all fit such as walking to playgroup or school, playing in the park or going swimming.

'I'm too old'

Have you thought about dancing? It's good fun, aerobic and keeps you flexible. Gyms and health clubs are not only for the young and fit. Many clubs offer good deals for off-peak users and special concessions for older people. If you enjoy leisurely walks try to build up to a brisk pace and go every day if possible.

'It hurts when I exercise'

Physical activity should feel pleasant and comfortable. If it's painful then you are overdoing it. Try a variety of activities until you find one that suits you. Swimming is often a good choice especially if you are pregnant, have a disability, a back problem or arthritis as the water supports your body weight. Many pools run special daytime sessions for different groups such as over-50s or parent and child.



The first step towards becoming more active is the most important one.

Safety points

- If you feel discomfort or pain when being more active then you should get advice from your doctor.
- Increase your level of activity gradually. This relates to both the amount of time you spend on the activity and the intensity. If you are currently fairly inactive, don't rush into being active. Start off very slowly.
- When you are doing any activity, begin slowly for the first few minutes and build up gradually. At the end spend a couple of minutes slowing down gradually.
- Stop exercising if you feel pain or dizziness, or if you feel sick, unwell or very tired.
- Do not exercise if you have a fever or feel unwell.
- Try to avoid walking alone at night and keep to well lit areas.
- If you're cycling, wear a helmet and reflective clothing. Use lights if cycling at night.
- Consult your GP about your activity if you have any condition for which you are taking prescribed medication.

Remember that regular moderate activity is better than occasional, vigorous bursts.

- 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on 5 or more days of the week.
- Start slowly at a level that suits you.
- Gradually build up the frequency, intensity and duration.
- Choose a variety of activities and ones you enjoy.
- Try to do something every day.



For more information

How the British Heart Foundation can help

British Heart Foundation

14 Fitzhardinge Street
London W1H 6DH
Phone: 020 7935 0185
Website: bhf.org.uk

Heart Information Line:

0845 0 70 80 70 (a local rate number)

An information service for the public and health professionals on issues relating to heart health.

Heart health catalogue

The British Heart Foundation produces a range of heart health materials on healthy living and heart conditions. To find out about these or to order your Heart health catalogue please go to bhf.org.uk/publications or call the BHF Orderline on 0870 600 6566 or email orderline@bhf.org.uk. Many of our publications are downloadable from bhf.org.uk/publications.

Give something back

We do not charge for our educational materials, but a donation will help us to help others.

You may be interested in some of the following BHF publications

Physical Activity

Put your heart into walking

How to keep your heart healthy and happy by walking your way to fitness.

Physical activity and your heart

(a Heart Information Series booklet)

Information for people with heart disease or high blood pressure, and for their families and friends.

Get kids on the go!

A booklet aimed at helping parents improve the physical activity and health of their children. There is also an English/Welsh version of this booklet available.

Healthy eating

So you want to lose weight ... for good

A guide to losing weight for men and women.

Cut the saturated fat

A wallchart that gives advice on how to cut down on the fat in your diet.

Guide to food labelling

A booklet to help you understand what food labels mean.

Eating for your heart

(a Heart Information Series booklet)
Information on healthy eating for people with coronary heart disease, and their family and friends.

Food should be fun ...and healthy!

A booklet that gives advice on how to follow an everyday healthy eating plan and features some delicious mouth-watering recipes.

Cholesterol on the level

A video aimed at people who are concerned about their cholesterol levels.

Walkabout UK

An annual series of sponsored walks which takes place around the country throughout the year. For more information please ring your nearest British Heart Foundation office. You can find the phone number in Yellow Pages.

The British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health

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Ashby Road
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Website: www.bhfactive.org.uk

The aim of the British Heart Foundation National Centre is to raise the profile of physical activity within the health agenda, in particular its role in preventing the risk of coronary heart disease.

Walking the Way to Health Initiative (WHI)

The British Heart Foundation, The Countryside Agency and The Countryside Council for Wales have joined forces to get more people walking in their local community – with benefits to their health and the local environment. We are helping people to choose, signpost and promote routes for walking; to organise guided walks for people who like walking in company; to provide information about healthy walking; and to make the physical environment in the town and countryside more interesting and safe to walk in.

If you would like advice about setting up a local walking scheme contact the WHI team on 01242 533 258 or go to www.whi.org.uk or contact The Countryside Council for Wales enquiry service on 0845 1306 229 or go to www.ccw.gov.uk

Paths to Health

The Paths to Health project supports local schemes in Scotland to promote walking in their communities. These schemes offer group led walks and information about safe, accessible and enjoyable places to walk locally. For more information go to www.pathstohealth.org.uk or telephone 01259 218 855.

Sustrans

Sustrans stands for sustainable transport. It is a charity that works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport in order to reduce motor traffic and its adverse effects. 5,000 miles of the flagship project, the National Cycle Network, were officially opened in 2000. This will increase to 10,000 by 2005.

Sustrans is also working on Safe Routes to Schools, Safe Routes to Stations, home zones and other practical responses to the transport and environmental challenges.

For any information on cycling – including different routes in your area – contact the Sustrans information service on 0117 929 0888 or their website www.sustrans.org.uk



Please help us to carry on saving lives, become a supporter of the BHF today

Who are the BHF?

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) is the nation's heart charity and raises funds for pioneering research that saves and improves the lives of people who have been affected by heart disease. Our aim is to ensure heart and circulatory disease is no longer a major cause of death in the UK.

What does the BHF do?

Research

We currently fund over 1,200 research projects, looking at every aspect of heart disease – from causes and safer drugs to improving surgical techniques.

Care

Our team of BHF Nurses visit heart patients in their homes offering medical assistance and emotional support.

Information

The Heart Information Line (0845 070 80 70) provides heart patients and their families with detailed and reliable information to help them cope with their condition.

Education

We teach children and adults about healthy eating and lifestyles that can help to reduce their risks of developing heart and circulatory disease.

Help us to keep hearts beating

We rely heavily on the general public to fund our work. In fact, over 80% of our total income is generated in this way.

Heart disease can strike at any time. That's why we desperately need you to help us fight this awful disease. **Please make a donation today.**

Please complete the form below and send it with your donation to **British Heart Foundation, Supporter Services, 14 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 6DH**

Please accept my gift as indicated:

£10 £15 £25 Other: £ _____

Please make your cheque/postal order/CAF voucher payable to: **British Heart Foundation**

Or please debit the above sum from my:

CAF Charity Card/MasterCard/Visa/Delta/Maestro

(delete as applicable)

Card number

Valid from _____

Expiry date _____

Issue no (Switch/Maestro only) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

To save costs we will only acknowledge your donation if you tick this box.

Name: _____
Address: _____

Postcode _____
Email _____

Please tick this box if you would like to receive email communications about the future activities of the BHF, via the email address you have provided (MP07)

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If you are a UK taxpayer you can add an extra 28p for every £1 you donate at no extra cost to you.

Yes, I am a UK taxpayer and would like the British Heart Foundation (BHF) to reclaim the tax on all the donations I have made since 6 April 2000 and all donations I make in the future as Gift Aid donations. (GA1)

Today's date _____

No, I am not a UK taxpayer (This is so that we don't write to you about Gift Aid again). (GA2)

For the BHF to reclaim the tax on your donation you have to be paying at least 28p in UK income or capital gains tax for every £1 you donate. Please note Gift Aid can only be claimed on individual personal donations and not collections. Please notify us of any changes in your details.

Other ways to get involved

There are lots of different ways to support the BHF, you'll find all the BHF contact details you'll need below.

For more information about the BHF credit card call **0800 028 2440** or online at bhf.org.uk/card.

To order the Healthy Lifestyle catalogue for products and help to keep you fit and healthy call **020 7487 9448**.

For sponsored bike rides, and walks, find out how you can get involved in BHF events call **020 7935 0185** or online at bhf.org.uk/events.

For more information on volunteering for the BHF call **020 7487 9461** or online at bhf.org.uk/volunteer.

What happens to your personal information

The BHF will use your personal information for administration purposes and to provide you with services, products and any information that you have requested.

*We greatly value your support and would like to keep you informed about our work through marketing literature in order to help our charitable aims. We may contact you by phone or post for this purpose. Please tick if you would prefer **not** to hear from the BHF in this way. (S)*

*We may want to share your information with other organisations that are in partnership with the BHF and share our aims and objectives. Please tick the box if you would prefer us **not** to share your details. (MP02)*

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Have your say

We would welcome your comments to help us produce the best information for you. Why not let us know what you think? Contact us via our website bhf.org.uk/yoursay