



# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

EVERY BIT COUNTS!



## Physical Activity: Every bit counts

The Heart Foundation is dedicated to fighting the single biggest killer of Australians – heart disease. For over 50 years, we have led the battle to save lives and improve the heart health of all Australians.

Our vision is an Australia free of heart disease and our mission is to prevent heart disease and improve the quality of life of all Australians through our work in prevention, support and research.

Many Australians aren't doing enough exercise to protect their heart health. **More than 80% of Australians don't meet the national guidelines on physical activity.**

When you miss out on being active, you're putting your heart health at risk; being physically inactive is one of the key risk factors for developing heart disease.

### Why does this matter?

Heart disease is Australia's biggest killer, taking 51 lives every day. But you can minimise your risk: keeping active means you are less likely to have a heart attack or to develop heart disease.

### How much physical activity do you really need?

The Heart Foundation supports Australia's physical activity guidelines. When it comes to physical activity for adults, the guidelines suggest:

- That any physical activity is better than none: it's okay to start small and build up your activity levels
- Be active on most, preferably all, days every week
- Each week aim to do a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate intensity or vigorous intensity physical activity
- Do muscle-strengthening activities on at least 2 days each week

**Remember, if you already have heart disease, doing physical activity will help you manage your condition.**



### Follow these simple tips to get active and look after your heart health:

- **Do 30-45 minutes** of moderate-intensity physical activity like brisk walking most days of the week. You can start small and build up activity: start by taking three 10-minute walks on three days each week.
- **Do muscle-toning** activities twice a week. You can meet this goal by doing bodyweight exercises push-ups, squats or lunges; tasks involving lifting, carrying or digging e.g. gardening or carrying shopping; or by lifting weights or doing other resistance training e.g. a gym-based weight training program.
- **Exercising for longer periods of time**, and on more days of the week is even better.

Remember, it doesn't matter how active you are, it's also important to sit less.

### When it comes to physical activity, what do 'moderate intensity' and 'vigorous intensity' mean?

Physical activity means any activity that gets your body moving and makes your breathing harder and your heart beat faster.

- **Moderate-intensity activities** make you breathe harder, but you can still talk while you're doing the activity including brisk walking, dancing, golf, social tennis, or household jobs like washing windows.
- **Vigorous-intensity activities** make you huff and puff, and you can't talk as easily while doing the activity including jogging, aerobics, organised sports.



### Why be active?

Doing regular physical activity makes you less likely to have a heart attack or develop heart disease.

Keeping active also helps to control other heart disease risk factors, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol and being overweight. Doing more physical activity can help prevent and manage over 20 chronic health conditions, including cancers, type 2 diabetes and depression.

*"... evidence shows that walking for an average of 30 minutes a day can lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes by 30 to 40 per cent. Brisk walking for 30 minutes a day, five days a week, has been shown to increase life expectancy by up to three years. Brisk walking also helps reduce both systolic and diastolic blood pressure and can help manage weight and cholesterol problems," -Adjunct Professor John Kelly, CEO National, Heart Foundation.*

Other benefits of doing regular physical activity include feeling more energetic, having stronger bones and muscles, and feeling happier and more relaxed.

### Check with your doctor before you start

Of course, if you aren't currently exercising, it's a good idea to speak with your doctor before you start; this is especially important if you have a heart condition, or if you think you might have heart disease.

You should also talk to your doctor about your plans to boost your physical activity if:

- You're a man over 35 or a woman over 45
- You're pregnant
- Being active causes chest pain
- You often faint or have severe dizzy spells
- Doing moderate-intensity activity makes you very breathless
- You smoke, are overweight, or have high cholesterol or high blood pressure
- Your heart beats too fast or your heart beat is irregular

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To start walking, find a group, or download the free Heart Foundation Walking App.



## How to set yourself up to succeed

Start small and build up to more intense physical activity over time. When you are starting to build your physical activity habit, you should choose activities that you enjoy: when you are having a great time being active, you are more likely to stick to your new habit.

Another tip for sticking to your new exercise habit is to vary the activity you do, so that you don't become bored with the one thing: mix things up between walking, riding a bike, lifting weights, resistance training, going to the gym or playing sports.

Planning your activity and blocking out time in your calendar can help you stick to your exercise goal, it's one way to make physical activity a part of your regular routine.

Exercising together with friends, family members, workmates, your partner or with an exercise group can help keep you motivated. Your health will also get a boost from building new social connections and friendships.



## Walking is a great way to get started.

Walking is fun, it's free and you don't need any special equipment! Plus, we know that walking is great for your heart, as well as for reducing stress, increasing your alertness, improving your overall health and for building strong relationships.

Best of all, walking is suitable for people of all ages and fitness levels. You can walk almost anywhere. Walking has a very low risk of injury, is low impact, isn't likely to harm your joints and you don't need any special equipment or training. If walking becomes your regular activity, you'll be building a healthier heart and body.

When you start walking, you will discover that regular exercise can:

-  Reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke
-  Manage your weight, blood pressure and cholesterol
-  Prevent and control diabetes
-  Reduce your risk of developing some cancers
-  Maintain your bone density
-  Improve your balance and coordination

Through the Heart Foundation Walking program, you can access walking groups all over Australia.



To learn more about the Heart Foundation Walking program and join a walking group, visit: [walking.heartfoundation.org.au](http://walking.heartfoundation.org.au) or download the Heart Foundation Walking App.



**For maximum benefit, repeat each stretch three to four times. Stretch the same number of times on each side.**

## Getting ready to walk

When you're about to go for a brisk walk, there are a few things you can do to prepare your body. Doing a gentle warm up and some simple stretches is a good way to improve flexibility and to prepare muscles for being active. Warming up before exercise also helps to prevent injuries. You should consider warming up and stretching at the start of every walk and, when possible, at the end.

### Warming up

Warming up improves circulation of blood to your muscles and helps your muscles to warm up and to get ready to move.

Consider walking on the spot or doing the first five minutes of your walk at a slower pace. Some people warm up by walking from home to the meeting point for their walk. If you're experiencing a light sweat, it's a good indication that your body is warm.

### Stretching

Stretching increases joint flexibility, eases muscular aches and pains and may help prevent injuries. When stretching, remember to:

- warm up your muscles first
- stretch slowly and ease in and out of each posture
- hold each stretch for 10–30 seconds
- avoid bouncing, as this may cause injury

Stretching should never be painful, so stretch to the point of mild discomfort so you can 'feel it', but not pain. If you are feeling pain, you are pushing yourself too hard.

## Examples of stretches



### Calf stretch

- Supported by pole or tree
- Front leg bent
- Heel on ground
- Back straight
- Back leg straight
- Hold for 10-30 seconds

For heart health information,  
please contact us on 13 11 12 or  
our website [heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au)



## Examples of stretches continued



### Quadricep stretch

- Tummy tucked
- Knees together
- Lift and hold your ankle
- Hold for 10-30 seconds



### Hamstring stretch

- Back straight
- Lean forward
- Front leg straight
- Toes up
- Back leg bent
- Hold for 10-30 seconds



### Tricep stretch

- Bend elbow to ear and hand behind neck
- Use other hand to pull elbow towards head
- Hold for 10-30 seconds



### Shoulder stretch

- Bring elbow bent across to opposite shoulder
- Support bent elbow with other hand
- Hold for 10-30 seconds

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