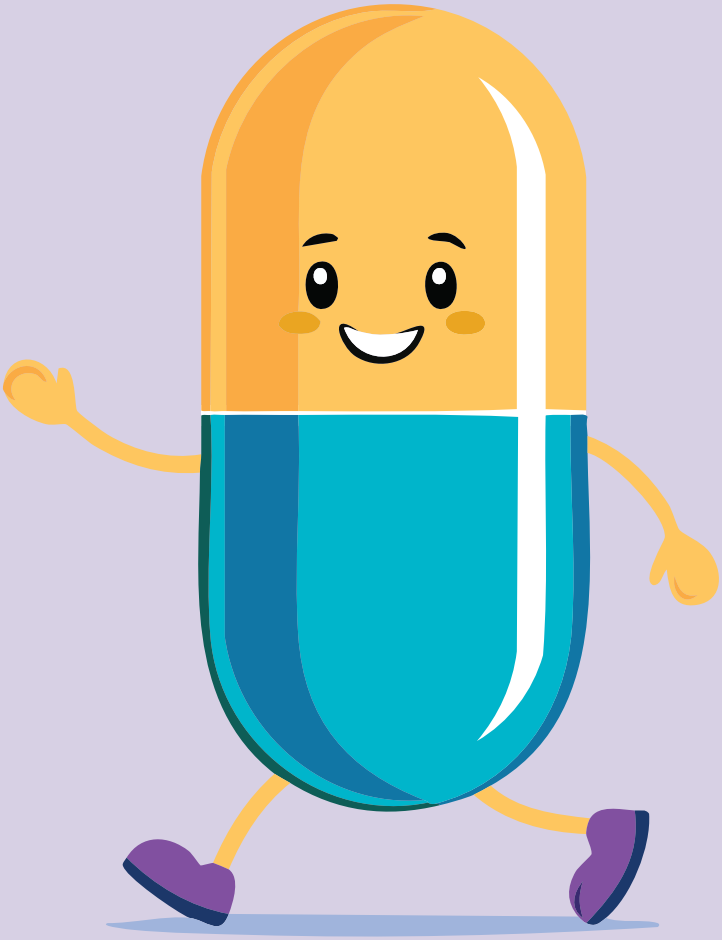
Moving is the best medicine



HSC Public Health Agency

Moving is the best medicine

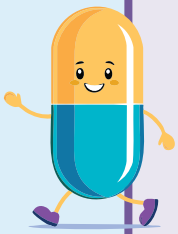
"If physical activity was a drug, it would be called a miracle cure due to the many illnesses it can help prevent and treat." [1]

Being physically active can:

- boost your mood;
- increase self-confidence;
- improve energy levels;
- improve sleep;
- ease back and joint pain;
- lower stress;
- help maintain independence.

Physical activity can also help reduce your risk of:

- heart disease;
- stroke;
- high blood pressure;
- high cholesterol;
- type 2 diabetes;
- certain cancers.



Move more than before

Any amount of movement is better than doing none at all. Whether you are physically active or not, research shows increasing the amount you do can benefit your health.

Getting started

It might be a little difficult to get motivated, especially if you haven't been active for some time. The good news is there are lots of ways to be more active and you don't have to join a gym.

Start small by finding easy ways to fit more activity into your daily routine. For instance:

- stand on the train or bus rather than sitting;
- take the stairs instead of the lift or walk up escalators;
- set a reminder to get up every 30 minutes and move;
- walk around when speaking on the phone;
- park a little further away and walk to your destination;
- try swapping TV time for more active tasks or hobbies.

1. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-uk-chief-medical-officers-report/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines

Moving more matters

Every bit of extra activity you do matters. Regular activity that gets the heart pumping a little harder can make us all look and feel better. It doesn't have to involve an intense work out. There are lots of activities to try out, or you could go back to something you haven't done for a while, such as cycling, Pilates, swimming or aqua aerobics, tennis, exercising at home to an online class or brisk walking.

Lots of people enjoy doing an activity as part of a pair or a bigger group, so why not ask a friend or family member to go walking or to take part in another activity and get active together? Doing an activity with others is also a great way to stay motivated.







How much is enough?

Any amount of activity is better than none, so do what you can and work towards your own achievable targets, which you could try to build up over time.

It's recommended that adults do 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity a week (20 minutes or so a day). You can do this by making every minute and movement count – even routine activities like hoovering, carrying shopping bags and cleaning can count towards your weekly target.



Move more safely

Staying active as we get older helps keep muscles and bones strong, supports balance, and can lift your mood, especially during the darker winter months.

Cold, ice and shorter days call for a few extra precautions, but with some simple adjustments you can keep moving safely.

Plan ahead, check the weather before heading out and, where you can, plan to be active during daylight hours.

Wear a few thin layers rather than one thick one to stay warm, and choose footwear with a good grip to help avoid slips on icy or wet paths.

Take care underfoot. Stick to routes that are gritted or well-maintained where possible, and consider using a walking pole for extra stability on uncertain ground.



Build strength and balance for healthy ageing

Falls are not an inevitable part of ageing – many can be prevented.

Strengthen your muscles at least twice a week to help you stay independent, active and able to do everyday tasks. This can include resistance band activities, gardening, stair climbing and sit-to-stand exercises.

Work on your balance at least twice a week to reduce your risk of falls and improve your confidence when moving around. Tai chi, strength and balance programmes, heel-to-toe walking and simple balance exercises can all help you stay steady on your feet.

Strong muscles and good balance are key to supporting healthy ageing.

If it's too icy or dark to be active outside, there's still plenty you can do indoors, such as gentle stretching exercises, yoga or dancing.

Warm up gently and ease into any activity slowly. Stop and rest if you feel unsteady or unwell.



As with any new activity, speak to your GP first if you haven't been active for a while, have a health condition that might affect activity, or have had a fall recently.

Remember, you can do it!

Becoming more physically active is easier than you think. Just begin by putting a little extra effort into the things you do daily and soon there will be no stopping you.

Try a number of activities, then choose the one you like best. The secret to success is doing something you enjoy, then you're more likely to keep doing it regularly.

Take it one day at a time, setting yourself realistic, achievable goals.

You could keep track of your progress by using the health app on your phone to track your steps or other activities. After a few weeks you'll look back and see how far you have come. You will also find you really enjoy having physical activity as part of your daily routine.



For tips and support on how to move more than before, go to: **www.nidirect.gov.uk/physical-activity**

HSC Public Health Agency

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