

Getting active

Physical activity or exercise is more than just maintaining a healthy weight.

Physical activity helps us keep both our body and mind healthy and can prevent many chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.

Physical activity is known to keep your muscles and bones strong, give you energy, and help you sleep better.

It can even help you relax, unwind and have a bit of fun!

Exercise has been shown to lower levels of stress and depression in young people, and this effect is even greater when you exercise with friends.

Why do young people need to stay active?

- » Manage mood changes and stress better.
- » Have fun with friends and meet new ones.
- » Get fitter by increasing your strength, stamina and flexibility
- » Maintain a healthy weight.
- » Make your bones and muscles stronger.
- » Relax and unwind.
- » Sleep better.
- » Feel more energetic.
- » Boost self-confidence and self esteem.
- » Lower your risk of Type 2 diabetes.
- » Be kind to the body you are in. It's just a body and it does like to move.

How much physical activity do you need?

Physical activity is anything that gets your heart pumping faster.

The amount of physical activity you need to do to keep healthy will depend on your age.

If you're over 18 years of age, aim to do 150 to 300 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous intensity activities each week.

If you're under 18 years old you need 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous activity each day.

You don't need to do all 60 minutes in one hit, you can break it up across the day.

What does moderate and vigorous intensity mean?

The difference between activities that are light, moderate and vigorous in intensity varies person to person depending on your fitness level.

One of the easiest ways to tell the level of intensity is the "talk test".

Vigorous activity will mean you'll struggle to talk and exercise at the same time.

Moderate activity means you'll be able to talk but you can't sing while you're exercising.

Light activity means you can easily talk and sing while you're exercising.

Try different types of activity

In a week, try to aim for a mix of aerobic exercise and strength training.

Aerobic exercise is the sort of activity that increases your breathing and heart rate, that makes you 'huff and puff'. Examples include running, swimming, cardio circuits and dancing.

Strength training involves the use of resistance to get your muscles contracting and expanding with movement. Examples include weight training and bodyweight exercises including yoga and pilates. A good technique while you do strength training is important to avoid injury. Get an accredited fitness instructor, physiotherapist or exercise scientist to show you how to do the exercise properly until you feel confident in the movement.

Both aerobic and strengthening exercise can be light, moderate or vigorous intensity depending on the activity.

If this all sounds a bit overwhelming, simply start with something you like and stick with it for a month to make the time you exercise a habit that you enjoy. Notice how you feel each week changes.

If you have been unwell or injured, ask your doctor, youth health nurse, physiotherapist, OT, exercise scientist or qualified fitness professional first what physical activity is suitable for you.

Ways to boost your physical activity

Here are some ideas and tips to help you make physical activity second nature and a routine part of your day so you don't think of all the reasons stopping you; you 'just do it'.

- » Get your shoes, clothes and sporting gear ready the night before.
- » Fill a water bottle ready to go.
- » Think about what kind of things you are interested in and you enjoy doing.
- » Find an exercise 'buddy' (human or canine)
- » Start small and build up as your fitness improves.

Team sports can not only help you make friends, but they keep you fit, active and accountable because of the commitment you've made to the other players and the coach. Common sports in Sydney include soccer, netball, basketball, softball and baseball, cricket, AFL and rugby.

If team sports isn't your thing, you could try solo sports like tennis, cycling, badminton, gymnastics, swimming, athletics, dancing and table tennis.

If you lose interest in a sport because of what you have to wear, look for other activities that you can wear what you feel comfortable in.

Free and low cost options

When money is tight, skip the expensive memberships and fees to try some of these free and low cost options:

- » Walk, jog or skateboard around your neighbourhood.
- » Kick a ball around with friends or family. You might be their motivation to get active!
- » Explore nature with a bushwalk.

- » Many local parks have public basketball or netball courts, soccer or footy fields, skate bowls, bike tracks and cricket nets.
- » If you live near the sea or a river, visit an ocean pool or water hole for a swim. Alternatively, council owned swimming pools have concession pricing available. Check out your local council's website or library to find out what's available, entry costs and when.
- » Keen to try running? Check out <https://www.parkrun.com.au/> to see if there are any community park runs happening near you.
- » Get onto YouTube for heaps of home, equipment-free workouts. Explore high-intensity interval training (HIIT), yoga and pilates options – there's thousands of videos out there for beginners through to fitness fanatics! Yoga with Adriene is a popular and free option.
- » Dance it out on Tik Tok or YouTube, on your own or with a couple of friends.

Ask a youth worker about opportunities to play to learn a sport locally or be active at the service.

Make your moves as incidental activity

One of the easier ways to get more active is to make it part of your everyday movements.

- » Consider walking or bike riding to the shops, school, work, TAFE or university.
- » If you catch public transport, try getting off a stop early and walking or riding the rest of the way and if you drive, try parking further away.
- » Some household chores like sweeping, mopping, vacuuming and mowing the lawns will get your heart rate up as well.
- » Catch up with a friend with a walk and talk (or phone or video call while you walk).
- » Use the stairs instead of the escalator or lift.

Remember that any movement is better than no movement, so the incidental stuff adds up too.

Are you too busy studying or working?

Did you know being physically active helps study?

- » Exercise before studying can help you concentrate.
- » Exercise after studying can help you retain what you have learnt or memorised.
- » Aerobic exercise has been shown to boost the part of your brain responsible for memory and learning.

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Exercise also helps improve your mood and mental health by:

- » reducing anxiety by getting your muscles contract and relax
- » changing your hormonal responses to stress
- » releasing feel good chemicals for your brain called endorphins
- » a physical release of frustration and big emotions
- » improving the quality of your sleep
- » helping your digestive system function and regulating your appetite.

So if you're feeling overwhelmed or stressed while you study, clear your mind by going for a brisk walk or a bike ride, shake it off with a dance or try stretching or a yoga routine before bed.

Use your screen time wisely

Be protective of your time to move by:

- » only viewing content that you really want to watch, and resist the autoplay features.
- » create regular calendar events and daily reminders/alerts in your phone.
- » use the device and/or social media settings to set up limits for how much time you want to spend on your screens or gaming during the week and on weekends.
- » Try out different ways of working on screens like a standing desk and take regular breaks where you stretch, have a drink, walk around and look outside. Your eyes will like this too.
- » Remember our bodies are made to move. Try out technology that makes you move to play.

Fuel your body with healthy eating

Healthy eating goes hand in hand with physical activity. You need lots of tasty and nutritious foods for energy and strength.

Remember to be kind to yourself and your body!

Don't under-rate rest

Make sure you have at least one or two recovery days every week when you are regularly exercising.

Cross-train with other sports and a good mix of different activities to reduce the risk of over training.

Avoid or modify any exercise that causes you pain

or discomfort. Don't ignore your body's signals of fatigue, discomfort and pain - it's trying to tell you something needs to change. Seeking out some help or advice when this happens is actually really smart (not shameful).

Remember that injuries need rest – trying to 'work through' the pain will cause more damage to soft muscle tissue and delay healing.

Need more information?

- » <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/keeping-active>
- » <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/physical-activity-and-exercise/physical-activity-and-exercise-guidelines-for-all-australians>

This fact sheet has been developed by Youthblock Youth Health Service, Sydney Local Health District for the Yhunger program.