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Physical activity
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Is it right for me?

It is never too late to start being more physically active. You can benefit from physical activity, whatever your age. The physical and mental effects from regular exercise can also help manage a lot of different health conditions, such as high blood pressure or diabetes.

The greatest benefits are gained when you start taking part in regular physical activity even if you've been inactive for a while. You will notice the difference as soon as you begin.

You don't need to buy new or expensive clothing. Just wear loose, comfortable clothes and a pair of flat shoes which will provide the best support.

Taking the first step

If you have been inactive for a while, a good place to start is to try and build more activity into your daily routine. The important thing is to use your body regularly and the improvements will follow.

Set yourself realistic and achievable goals and don't despair if you miss a day.

Here are some ideas to help you to gradually increase your activity levels and to keep it fun:

- choose things that you like to do. Ask around and find out what's on near you; your local Age Cymru Partner will know what is available locally
- try the local library, leisure centre or council for information on suitable activities for your fitness level
- join an exercise class or a walking group; having company may add to the enjoyment. If you'd prefer something more private, try an exercise DVD you can use at home
- if you need encouragement to try something new, go with a friend
- varying the activities you do will help maintain your interest and challenge your body

- in warmer weather, you may want to get out and about more. When it's colder you may want to join an indoor group or be more active around the house
- there are exercises you can do while sitting or in the swimming pool. Special exercise programmes can help people with arthritis, osteoporosis and Parkinson's.

Age Cymru's Nordic Walking programme provides opportunities across Wales for people aged 50+ and which are suitable for all fitness levels. You walk using a pair of specially designed, lightweight poles that provide additional support meaning you benefit more from the exercise.



Take a look at the useful contacts section of this leaflet for further help and information.

It's easy to get going

You may have a few considerations to think about when trying to increase your activity levels. Here are a few tips that will help you get on the path to being more active.

Time

You don't necessarily need to set aside 'special time' to get more active. Activity can quite easily be introduced as part of your daily routine. Try getting off the bus a few stops earlier, use the stairs instead of the lift/escalator or walk to the local shops.

Sport

You don't need to be good at sport to get more active. There are many different activities like walking, dancing and gardening that you can take part in. If you do want to take up a sporting activity, ask your local leisure centre for information on opportunities or contact Sport Wales in the useful contact section.

Age

You are never too old to feel the benefits of healthy activity. If you've been inactive for some time, you will still feel the benefits. Take up a new activity but start gently and build up gradually.

Cost

You don't have to buy special clothes or equipment, walking is the best activity and it's free! If you do want to join a group or class, check for offers or special rates. Remember that it's free to go for a walk in your local park. There's lots of evidence that proves the benefits of exercising outdoors in green spaces, such as improving your mood and self esteem.

Why physical activity?

There are so many positive effects from being regularly active that we could fill this whole leaflet. We've listed a few below to give you an idea of what to expect.

The physical benefits include:

- your heart and lungs work more efficiently
- maintain a healthy weight
- strengthen your muscles and bones
- maintain your mobility and independence
- you cope with everyday tasks
- improve your strength and flexibility; this will help your posture
- increase your balance and co-ordination; this will help prevent a fall.

The psychological/emotional benefits include:

- you get out and about and meet new friends
- it gives you a sense of achievement and increased confidence
- you do the things you want to do
- it can help de-stress you and help you cope with worries
- it can relax you and help you sleep better.

Being active can help you maintain your mobility and independence, so you can do the things that you want to do and live life to the full.

How much I should do?

Ideally, you should aim to be active on a daily basis but any amount of extra activity that is appropriate for your age group and health makes a difference. Always warm up thoroughly by easing your body into activity for the first 5-10 minutes.

The following recommendations are based on Government advice and give you an idea of how much activity to build up to gradually:

- Moderate activity will help to develop your stamina and includes activities such as brisk walking and ballroom dancing. You should feel warmer and a little breathless when taking part in these activities, but you should still be able to keep a conversation going.

Over a week, your moderate activity should add up to at least 150 minutes (2½ hours). This can be in bouts of 10 minutes or more – one way to approach this is to do 30 minutes on at least 5 days a week.

- If you are already active, then you can improve your fitness by aiming for 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity spread across the week. Again, this can be in bouts of 10 minutes or more. Vigorous activities are those that will make you breathe harder and your heart beat faster so you will find it difficult to maintain a conversation. Examples include running or stair climbing.
- Maintaining muscle strength is important as you get older and you should aim to undertake activities that involve using your body weight or working against a resistance on at least two days a week. Examples include carrying groceries, moving heavy loads or chair aerobics.
- Improving your balance and coordination will help lower your risk of a fall. Taking part in activities such as Tai Chi or Yoga twice a week, can help to improve your balance and coordination.

**Do not take part if you are tired, unwell or have just eaten.
If you experience any pain or discomfort then stop straight away.**

Do I need to check with my doctor before I begin?

If you are enjoying good health and do not suffer from heart problems, pains in the chest, joint or bone problems, then you can gradually build more activity into your life without consulting your doctor. However, always check with your GP if you have had an illness, have any worries about your health, or if you have been inactive for a long time.

Ask your General Practitioner (GP) if there is an Exercise Referral Scheme in your area and if you meet the criteria. If you qualify, you will be referred to exercise professionals at a local leisure centre and they will give you a personal exercise programme

Useful contacts

This leaflet is part of a series of resources that support the Ageing Well in Wales programme.

Age Cymru

Age Cymru manages the Nordic Walking and Low Impact Functional Training (LIFT) physical activity programmes in Wales. Ageing Well in Wales is a national programme that is delivered locally to promote health and wellbeing.

Visit the health and wellbeing pages of the Age Cymru website to find out more about healthy living:

www.agecymru.org.uk

If you would like further information on the above programmes and how to become involved please contact Age Cymru on:

Tel: 029 2043 1555

Email: ageingwell@agecymru.org.uk or nordicwalking@agecymru.org.uk

Age UK Advice

Age Cymru is working in partnership with Age UK to provide Age UK Advice. For free factsheets on a range of topics, ring Age UK Advice on: 0800 169 65 65 (freephone) open seven days a week from 07.00-19.00

Lets Walk Cymru

This is a Wales wide initiative to provide information about walking programmes in Wales, specifically health walks.

To find out about walking opportunities in your areas, contact Lets Walk Cymru on:

Tel: 029 2033 8357

Email: letswalkcymru@sportwales.org.uk

Website: www.lets-walk-cymru.org.uk

Free swimming

Swimming is free for people aged over 60 in Wales. Contact your local leisure centre for more information.

Sport Wales

Sport Wales are charged with developing a nation of sporting champions and encouraging participation in sport. For more information on opportunities for older people contact Sport Wales on:

Tel: 0845 045 0904

Email: info@sportwales.org.uk

Website: www.sportwales.org.uk



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