



STR8↑UP HEALTH

Movement is medicine for creating change in a person's physical, emotional and mental states.

Carol Welsh

What is physical activity and exercise?

Physical activity is any movement produced by your muscles that requires energy.

It refers to all movement including using your arms and or legs, dancing around, giving the bedroom a good clean, or as part of your work. Both moderate and vigorous physical activity improve health.

Exercise is physical activity that is planned, repetitive and focused on improving or maintaining part of your physical fitness (ie, strength). Think, going to the gym, walking, stretching, dance class or yoga.



Here's our guide to:

Why physical activity and exercise rocks, how to get started, top tips, types of activity, incorporating exercise into your daily life. It also outlines services and supports you can reach out to.

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1

What's all the fuss?

Physical activity has significant benefits for our hearts, bodies and minds – it is one of the very best things you can do for your hauora and health.

Evidence shows that being regularly active helps to prevent and manage mental distress, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity and certain cancers. It also improves your mood, heart rate and circulation, immunity, brain function, muscle and bone strength, balance, chronic pain, self-esteem, stress, sleep, energy usage (maintaining healthy weight) and wellbeing!

Key take aways (not the fast food kind)

Physical activity does wonders for your body and mind.

Move more, sit less.

You don't have to wear lycra to get some benefits.

Top facts

- Doing some physical activity is better than doing none! You don't have to be a "gym bunny". Walking, stretching, sex, cleaning – it all counts!
- There has been no improvement in global levels of physical activity since 2001 – eek!
- We are sitting more than ever (cue Netflix!). For rangatahi, evidence shows poor outcomes with increased sedentary behaviour including weight gain, poor fitness, behaviours and reduced sleep duration. Stand when you can!
- In the latest NZ stats, 58% of young people meet physical activity guidelines.
- It is recommended you do at least 2.5 hours of moderate or 1.25 hours of vigorous physical activity spread throughout the week.
- For mental health benefits, frequency of exercise counts. You can do less, but more often – we know that even a 10-minute brisk walk a day has huge impacts on mood!

2 Getting started and top tips

Making physical activity fun, being active with others and having some personal goals are some of the best ways to get started and stay motivated!

It's hard to start or keep doing something we don't want to do! Find an activity you think you will enjoy and feel comfortable doing, schedule it in once or twice a week and take that first step to feeling good. From there, build up to three to five sessions per week.

Top tips – make a plan!

1. Start small, build up – could you walk instead of drive to your local supermarket? Brainstorm small changes you can make.
2. Write down your “why”! Getting clear on what benefits you are looking for and some initial goals will help you stay focused and feel a sense of achievement.
3. Work out what exercises appeal to you and find out where to do them.
4. Schedule your exercise in – diarise your activity sessions for the week and, where possible, plan to meet a friend or whānau member to do activity with – this often helps us to follow through.
5. Get organised! If you plan to do a home workout from YouTube in the morning, put your clothes out next to your bed ready to go.
6. Motivation can decrease over time so remember to change things up and try a new activity if you get bored! Team sports are good too if you're looking for connection and accountability.

Key take aways (not the fast food kind)

Start with one or two activities a week.

Planning and goal setting is key.

Commit to moving the way you want to, something fun and sustainable.



So you've started exercising moderately a few times a week – when will you see or feel the benefits?

In the short term (four weeks), you are likely to feel more energetic, your posture will improve and if improving your nutrition, too, you may experience some weight loss.

In the long term (three months+), real changes to muscle strength, cardiovascular health and endurance can be realised!

The changes you experience will depend on your initial fitness levels, goals and the types and intensity of exercise you are doing. Want to build muscle? Focus on strength exercises!

There are many different activities – find one that floats your boat! You don't have to be sprinting and sweating to get some benefit.

You don't have to just walk, gym or swim to be active – standing on one leg is good too! Moderate intensity activity is important, though, if you're looking for mental health benefits.

Types of activity you may not have considered

Karate, water aerobics, hula hooping, dance (aerobics, ballroom, ballet, zumba, hip hop) jumping rope, judo, wheelchair basketball, table tennis, badminton, boxing, golf, gymnastics, roller-derby, trampolining, pilates, snow sports, swimming, home-based workouts.

Intensity – move fast and slow to get all the benefits

Low: You can easily talk in full sentences, or sing. Eg, stretching.

Moderate: You can speak in full sentences, but not sing. Eg, roller skating.

Vigorous: You are too breathless to speak in full sentences. Eg, high impact aerobics.

Forms of activity

Endurance: Referred to as "aerobic", increases breathing and heart rate. Eg, biking.

Strength: Using body weight or external resistance to build muscle. Eg, press ups.

Balance: Activities or positions to control and stabilise your body position. Eg, yoga.

Flexibility: Exercises that increase range of motion of a joint/group of joints. Eg, stretching.

4 Incorporating movement daily

Incidental activity is any activity built up in small amounts over the day – it can make a huge difference to your health and your total physical activity levels.

If the thought of planning structured exercise is too much right now, brainstorm all the ways to increase your daily activity based on your current lifestyle. Do you always take the escalator? Commit to making a few changes and see that step count rise!

Five ways to incorporate movement daily

1. **Park your car, or get off the bus further away than you need to.** A short stroll to your destination adds exercise into your day.
2. When planning meetings, make them **moving meetings**. Instead of meeting a mate for coffee, get a takeaway and go around a park instead. Fresh air and blood pumping to your brain is also great for problem-solving, too.
3. Reach for your phone when TV ads come on? Try doing a **short exercise session in each ad break** instead eg, sit and stand from the couch through the break, do some squats or have a stretch.
4. **Take the stairs.** Ditch the lift/escalator and take the stairs, if you can.
5. **Stand whenever possible** – on the bus/train and hourly while studying or chilling.

Key take aways (not the fast food kind)

Small changes =
big difference.

Brainstorm all the times in
your day you could move!

Google “incidental activity
ideas” for more inspo!



Support ideas and info

- 1. Use an app** – See our list of activity, weight loss and nutrition apps [here](#), most of which are free!
- 2. Contact a Green Prescription team** – A Green Prescription Rōngoa Kākāriki is a free health and wellness support service available throughout New Zealand. They know where to find local activities, costs and organisations. Connect with them [here](#).

You don't have to go it alone – support services, apps and resources can all help you start a new positive physical activity plan.

Set yourself up to succeed by leaning on the various supports that are available. Equipping yourself with information also helps to keep motivation and confidence high.



Key take aways (not the fast food kind)

Use the help that's available.

There are a lot of supports that make physical activity easier, and to help you stay accountable.

- 3. Go online!** The UK's National Health Service has lots of [free workout videos](#) for beginners and intermediate level on its website. BBM Motivation also has free live videos on its [Facebook page](#). [YouTube](#) is another great free place to search for activity videos.
- 4.** Watch [this](#) fun and informative video on physical activity for health.
- 5.** Visit our Health Navigator pages on [physical activity and exercise](#).
- 6.** Try [this](#) action plan and goal setting resource.

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