

## STAYING SAFE

- If you do not know how much physical activity you can do safely or you have other medical concerns such as heart problems eg. angina, or joint problems eg. arthritis, ask your GP or practice nurse for advice.
- Make sure you start slowly and build up to the recommended levels. Avoid high intensity, high impact activities, for example jumping up and down. This puts unnecessary stress on your joints.
- Wear appropriate and comfortable footwear.

If you experience any of the following problems stop and ask for medical advice from your GP or contact NHS Direct on **0845 4647**:

- Discomfort in your chest or upper body
- Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness brought on by physical activity
- Dizziness or nausea on exertion
- Fainting during or just after doing activity
- Palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.

## PROFESSIONAL'S DETAILS

## Notes/Local information

## WHO IS SPORTEX/HEALTHEX?

We specialise in producing information and resources for medical, health and exercise professionals around the subject of exercise, health and musculoskeletal injury. This includes a range of subscription-based publications and accompanying advice handouts for patients and clients. All our material is produced by leading medical professionals and reviewed by peers working in relevant industries. For more information visit [www.sportex.net](http://www.sportex.net)



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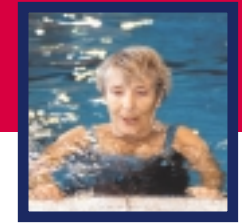
## MORE INFORMATION

- Age Concern 020 8765 7200  
[www.ageconcern.org.uk](http://www.ageconcern.org.uk)
- Help the Aged 020 8765 7200  
[www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk)
- British Heart Foundation - 08450 708070 or [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks to all those who reviewed this leaflet including our editorial panel (for more information see [www.sportex.net](http://www.sportex.net)). Thanks also to Later Life Training Ltd. for their input (see details above).

# EXERCISE AND OLDER ADULTS



## WHY IS EXERCISE A GOOD IDEA?

With many more people living longer it is increasingly important to maintain your own health, independence and well-being through regular physical activity.

## BENEFITS

Every day the evidence grows to support the importance of physical activity for health in the general population. However it is becoming increasingly clear that it is particularly important among older adults even in advanced old age.

Being active in daily life can:

- Reduce the risk of depression

- Increase muscle strength and flexibility
- Reduce the risk of falls due to improved balance and co-ordination
- Lead to improved mental functioning
- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Reduce your risk of suffering a heart attack or stroke
- Enhance your mood and self-esteem
- Enhance sleep quantity and quality
- Allow the formation of new friendships due to widening social networks.

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# Be active - be safe - have fun!

# EXERCISE AND OLDER ADULTS

## HOW CAN ACTIVITY HELP?

Immobility, particularly among frail older adults with many illnesses, can lead to further complications. These can be reduced through movement. These complications might include:

- Deep vein thrombosis (clotting)
- Swelling of the legs as a result of an accumulation of fluid
- Pressure sores
- Severe constipation.

## Maintaining independence

Regular activity can help maintain mobility and independent living and evidence shows it will help to maintain your ability to get on with everyday tasks such as:

- The strength to lift objects
- Flexibility to wash your hair or tie your shoes
- Balance and agility to climb stairs or use the bus

- Coordination and dexterity to open a door with a key or grasp a moving object
- Speed to cross a road at a pedestrian crossing before the traffic light changes to green
- Muscle endurance to walk to the shops
- The ability to continue living an independent life and play with your grandchildren.

**A thought:** After the age of 30, strength, bone density, flexibility and aerobic capacity are all lost at the rate of about 10% per decade. A week's bed rest will reduce your muscular strength by up to 20% and at the same time, bone strength will reduce by 1%. However regular progressive strength training over 3-6 months can increase strength by 10-20%, setting the clock back by 10-20 years.

## WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITY IS BEST?

While stamina-based activity is important for aerobic health, with increasing age, strength based exercises and balance and coordination skills become more important.

**Stamina-type activities:** Walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, tennis and housework (washing floors or windows)

**Strength-type activities:** Carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (digging or mowing) and housework

**Balance-type activities:** Dancing, yoga, Pilates, T'ai Chi and gardening

## Tips on increasing your activity level

- Walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. Perhaps take a dog for a walk, or go with a friend, and to make it more interesting you could use a pedometer to count your steps.
- Look for opportunities to be active during your whole day. For example park at the far end of the car park, or walk one stop further to catch the bus, and take 10 minutes before lunch to go for a walk.
- Try using the stairs instead of the escalator. If you do use the escalator, start by walking part of the way and gradually progress to walking up the whole way.
- Choose activities that you enjoy doing. Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable.

## HOW MUCH AND HOW OFTEN?

**Frequency** A good aim is to try to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week however this may be too much to start with. One goal is to try and increase your activity by 2 minutes each day. It would be worth asking the advice of someone who specialises in exercise for older adults such as a physiotherapist. Alternatively ask your GP.

**Intensity** Moderate intensity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time and still feel comfortable.

**Advice** Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases for the first 10 minutes until you have reached the level you can maintain for your chosen period of activity. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually.

**Remember** Set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off.