



Myths about Physical Activity

Being physically active is too expensive. It takes equipment, special shoes and clothes...and sometimes you even have to pay to use sports facilities.

Physical activity can be done almost anywhere and does not necessarily require equipment! Carrying groceries, wood, books or children are good complementary physical activities, as is climbing the stairs instead of using the elevator. Walking is perhaps the most practiced and most highly recommended physical activity and it is absolutely free. Some urban areas have parks, waterfronts or other pedestrian areas that are ideal for walking, running or playing. It is not imperative to go to a gym, pool or other special sports facility to be physically active.

I'm very busy. Physical activity takes too much time!

It only takes 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity five days per week to improve and maintain your health.

However, this does not mean that physical activity must always be performed for 30 minutes at a time. The activity can be accumulated over the course of the day: a 10 minute brisk walk, three times a day; or 20 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes later that day. These activities can be incorporated into your daily routine - at work, school, home or play. Simple things like taking the stairs, riding a bike to work or getting off the bus two stops before your final destination and then walking the rest of the way can accumulate over the day and can form part of your regular daily activities.

Even if you are very busy - you can still fit 30 minutes of physical activity into your daily routine to improve your health.

Children by nature have so much energy. They hardly sit still. There's no need to spend time or energy teaching them about physical activity. They are already so active.

Each day children and youth aged 5 to 17, should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity to ensure healthy development. However, physical activity levels are decreasing among young people in countries around the world, especially in poor urban areas.

This decline is largely due to increasingly common sedentary ways of life. For example fewer children walk or cycle to school and excessive time is devoted to watching television, playing computer games, and using computers - often at the expense of time and opportunities for physical activity and sports. Physical education and other school-based physical activities have also been decreasing.

Importantly, patterns of physical activity and healthy lifestyles acquired during childhood and adolescence are more likely to be maintained throughout the life-span. Consequently, improving physical activity levels in young people is imperative for the future health of all populations.

Physical activity is for people in the "prime of life". At my age, I don't need to be concerned with it...

Regular physical activity has been shown to improve the functional status and quality of life of older adults. It is recommended that adults aged 65 and above do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week or do at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity.

Many noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) prevalent in older adults can benefit from participation in regular physical activity (cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, hypertension, falls prevention). Physical activity has also been shown to improve mental health and cognitive function in older adults and has been found to contribute to the management of disorders such as depression and anxiety. Active lifestyles often provide older persons with regular occasions to make new friendships, maintain social networks, and interact with other people of all ages.

While being active from an early age can help prevent many diseases, regular movement and activity can also help relieve the disability and pain associated with these conditions. Importantly, the benefits of physical activity can be enjoyed even if regular practice starts late in life.

Physical activity is needed only in industrialised countries. Developing countries have other problems.

Physical inactivity is now identified as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. Physical inactivity is also an independent risk factor for noncommunicable diseases which caused more than 35 million deaths in 2005. Importantly, 80% of deaths from common NCDs occur in low- and middle-income countries. Therefore, noncommunicable diseases associated with physical inactivity are a significant public health problem in most countries around the world.

Levels of inactivity are high in virtually all developed and developing countries. In developed countries more than half of adults are insufficiently active. In rapidly growing large cities of the developing world, physical inactivity is an even greater problem. Urbanisation has resulted in several environmental factors which discourage participation in physical activity particularly in the transport and occupational domains. In rural areas of developing countries, sedentary pastimes (e.g. watching television) are also becoming increasingly popular.