



**Irish Heart  
Foundation**

**BE ACTIVE**

**and reduce your risk  
of heart disease  
and stroke**



## Why be active?

Getting regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do to improve your overall health.

### Physical health

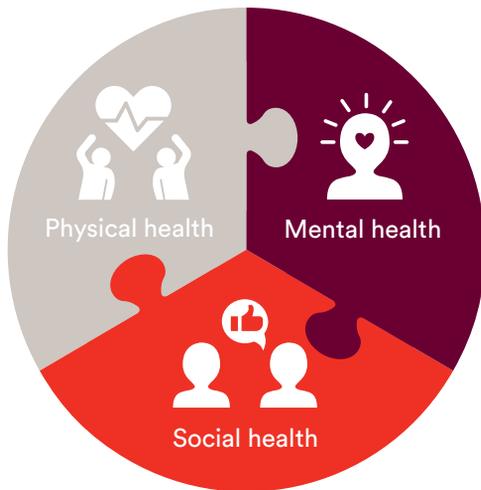
Being physically active can help reduce blood pressure, cholesterol levels and weight which can in turn help to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

### Mental health

Regular exercise can help lift your mood, reduce stress levels and improve self-esteem.

### Social health

Exercise can be fun and social. Join a new class, team or group or simply get active with friends, family or colleagues.



Physical inactivity is responsible for 8.8% of Coronary Heart Disease in Ireland

## How much activity should I do?

Adults should be active at a **moderate intensity**, for at least 30 minutes per day, 5 days per week. **Muscle strengthening** activity should be included 2-3 days a week.

Additionally, older adults should also include balance activities 2-3 days per week.

### For adults with disability

For adults with disabilities, be as active as your ability allows. Choose activities that suit your ability and aim to achieve the guidelines of 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity, 5 days per week.

### What is moderate intensity?

Moderate intensity describes how much effort you are putting into an activity. Moderate intensity is the ideal level to be working at for heart health benefits.

### What does moderate intensity feel like?

Your body tells you when you are working at moderate intensity through three key signs: breathing, temperature and heart rate.



#### 1. BREATHING

You can still talk, but your conversation slows down



#### 2. TEMPERATURE

You feel a bit warmer but are not sweating profusely



#### 3. HEART RATE

You can feel your heart beating a bit faster but it's not pounding

## Examples of moderate intensity activity

Moderate intensity is different for each person depending on how fit you are. The fitter you are, the more effort is required to get to moderate intensity. If you are starting out on your activity journey, walking might be enough to get you to moderate intensity. As you get fitter, you must challenge yourself to ensure you still feel the three keys signs of moderate intensity.

Moderate intensity activity	As you get fitter, challenge yourself
Walking	Walk faster, add an incline, engage your arms
Jogging	Increase speed, increase distance
Swimming	Add extra lengths, change swim stroke to a more challenging one
Cycling	Increase speed, increase distance, add an incline

## What are muscle-strengthening activities?

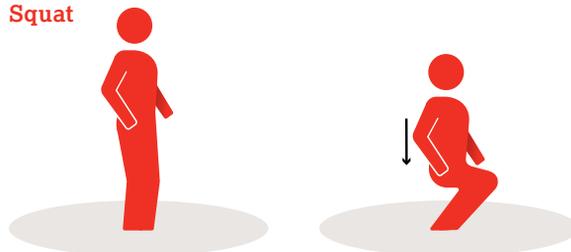
Activity guidelines say that adults should include muscle-strengthening activities 2-3 times per week. We use our muscles to move about, to lift things, to walk upstairs, etc. As we get older, we begin to lose muscle, reducing our mobility and making everyday tasks more difficult. But we can help prevent muscle loss by including muscle-strengthening activities 2-3 times per week.



## Example of muscle-strengthening activities

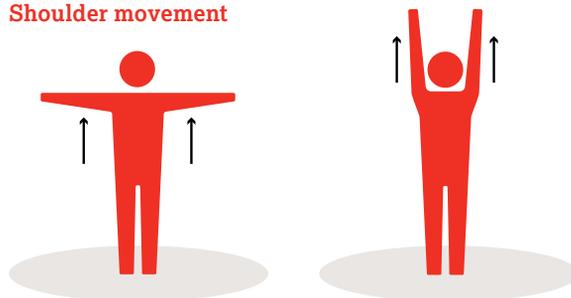
Everyday muscle-strengthening activities include carrying bags of groceries or digging the garden. You could also use hand-held weights or weight machines in the gym. Below are a couple of simple body weight exercises you can practise at home.

### Squat



- Stand tall, feet hip-width apart
- Looking forward, lower buttocks to a seated position
- Rise to a standing position
- You should be able to see your toes throughout the movement

### Shoulder movement



- Stand tall with both arms by your side, palms facing in
- Raise arms to shoulder level, bend elbows slightly and face palms to the sky
- Push both arms up to full height, straight above head
- Lower to shoulders, then back to side

## Do I need to include balance exercises?

Older adults should include balance activities 2-3 days per week. As we age, loss of muscle strength combined with a reduction in mobility can lead to poor balance and an increased risk of falls. However, we can practise and improve our balance.

### Examples of balance activities

Practices like yoga and Tai Chi can help improve our balance but you can also improve your balance with simple home-based activities. While the guideline is for older adults, you're never too young to challenge your balance!

#### Tightrope walking



- Walk forward placing heel to toe as if on a tightrope
- To make it more challenging you could try stepping very slowly, walk backwards or lift the lead knee high before placing the foot down

#### Standing on one foot



- Raise one leg up and balance on the other foot
- Count how long you can balance
- Use your arms to help you balance if you need to
- You can make it even more challenging by closing your eyes.
- Switch to the other leg and repeat.

## Sedentary behaviour

### What is sedentary behaviour?

Sedentary behaviour is any time spent sitting or lying down, using very little energy, while we are awake. This includes time spent sitting at a computer, watching television, driving, etc.

### Why do we need to reduce sedentary behaviour?

Sedentary behaviour has been shown to increase your risk of developing heart disease or stroke. If we achieve the physical activity guidelines but spend a large amount of time sitting down, we could still be putting our health at risk.



### How do we reduce our sedentary behaviour?

There are two main recommendations for reducing sedentary behaviour

1. Reduce the amount of time spend sitting throughout the day
2. Break up long periods of sitting with movement as often as possible

We live and work in an environment where it can be difficult to reduce our sitting time. Many people work at desk jobs or drive for hours each day. Nonetheless, it is possible to find opportunities to incorporate short bursts of movement into the day, which in turn can help reduce sedentary time.

Here are some examples of small steps you can take to reduce sitting time during your working day, travel and leisure time.

Try choose one idea for each part of your day.

The time you spend at work	The time you spend travelling	Leisure time
Take the stairs instead of the lift	If you travel by bus or train, try getting off a stop early and walking the rest of the way	Schedule time into your diary for your activity of choice
Try our desk workout online at <a href="http://www.irishheart.ie">www.irishheart.ie</a>	Instead of driving short distances, try walking or cycling instead	Use your lunch break to get active – try taking a 15-minute stroll
Set a reminder in your calendar to move every hour	If you drive to public transport, try walking or cycling	Plan social gatherings around activity like a walk in the park or try a new activity class with a friend
Stand up while making phone calls	Park farther away from your destination (e.g. at the far end of a car park)	Seek out opportunities for free activity in your local area like parkrun ( <a href="http://www.parkrun.ie">www.parkrun.ie</a> )
Walk over to a colleague's desk instead of calling or sending an email	Stand instead of sitting on public transport	Keep motivated by trying new activities or rediscover activities you once enjoyed

## Take small steps to better health

Keeping track of the number of steps you take each day can be a great way to check how much movement you get into the day and allows you to see any changes in your activity levels. 10,000 is the recommended number of steps to take in a day and all steps count.



Most smartphones have a health app that will track steps, or you can download one for free. Steps can also be recorded with a simple step counter or a wearable tracking device.

### How active am I?

Do I take 30 minutes of activity at least five days a week?

YES  NO

If yes, do I feel the three key signs of moderate intensity during my activity sessions?

YES  NO

Do I get at least 10,000 steps a day?

YES  NO

If you answered no to any of the above, consider ways to move more and move more often. Find out more at [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)



## Tips on getting active safely



1. If you have been unwell or have been inactive for a long time, consult your GP before starting any activity programme



2. Choose activities you enjoy and vary the activity you do



3. Get active with a friend to keep motivated



4. Warm up before exercise with some gentle movement



5. Warm down after exercise with some stretching



6. Plan times for activity into your weekly diary so it becomes a priority



7. Drink water before and after you exercise



8. Wear comfortable clothing and supportive shoes



9. Take every opportunity to move throughout the day



10. Listen to your body: stop the activity if you feel unwell or have any pain



Chose an activity that you enjoy

## Ideas to help you move more

### Move More Walking Challenge

Download a free six-week walking plan to help you achieve the National Physical Activity Guidelines [www.irisheart.ie](http://www.irisheart.ie)

### Sitting time calculator

Calculate how much time you spend sitting down throughout the day [www.irisheart.ie](http://www.irisheart.ie)

### Slí na Sláinte routes

Discover over 220 community-based walking routes nationally or find out how to set up a Slí na Sláinte route in your community, school or workplace [www.irisheart.ie](http://www.irisheart.ie)

### Desk workout

Break up your sedentary time with our desk-based activity routine link to webpage [www.irisheart.ie](http://www.irisheart.ie)

### parkrun

Walk, run or jog in a free, local 5km event [www.parkrun.ie](http://www.parkrun.ie)

### Get Ireland Walking

Find a local walking group in your area [www.getirelandwalking.ie](http://www.getirelandwalking.ie)

### Irish Trails Office

Discover the national network of activity trails [www.irisstrails.ie](http://www.irisstrails.ie)

### Local Sports Partnership

See what activities are happening in your local community [www.sportireland.ie](http://www.sportireland.ie)

## Funding:

The **Irish Heart Foundation** is the national charity fighting heart disease and stroke and relies on charitable donations for 90 per cent of its funding. We support, educate and train people to save lives, campaign for patients, promote positive health strategies, support research and provide vital public information. We need your support – through donations, as a volunteer or on our training courses.

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Seirbhís Sláinte  
Níos Fearr  
á Forbairt

Building a  
Better Health  
Service

