

Would you like to be able to help reduce your risk of major illnesses, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer by up to 50% and lower your risk of early death by up to 30%.

There is something you can do that's easy to take, has an immediate effect and you don't need to get via your GP.

So what is the name of this amazing drug?

Exercise.

Exercise is the wonder cure we've always had, but we've abandoned taking our recommended prescribed amount for too long. Our health is now in distress as a result.

Whatever your age, there's strong scientific facts that being physically active can help you lead an improved, fuller and more contented life.

Exercise does not have to be something that is a thing of the past; exercise is for life not just for kids!

People who do regular activity can have a lower risk of many chronic diseases, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and some cancers.

Research shows that physical activity can also boost self-esteem, mood, sleep quality and energy, as well as reducing your risk of stress, depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Health benefits

Given the vast evidence, it is evident that we should all be physically active. It's

It's medically proven that people who do regular physical activity have:

- up to a 35% lower risk of coronary heart disease and stroke
- up to a 50% lower risk of type 2 diabetes
- up to a 50% lower risk of colon cancer
- up to a 20% lower risk of breast cancer
- a 30% lower risk of early death
- up to an 83% lower risk of osteoarthritis
- up to a 68% lower risk of hip fracture
- a 30% lower risk of falls (among older adults)
- up to a 30% lower risk of depression
- up to a 30% lower risk of dementia

What counts?

Moderate-intensity aerobic activity means you're working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat. One way to tell if you're working at a moderate intensity is if you can still talk but you can't sing the words to a song.

Daily chores such as shopping, cooking or housework don't count towards your 150 minutes. This is because the effort needed to do them isn't hard enough to get your heart rate up.

A modern problem

People are less active nowadays, partly because technology has made our lives easier. We drive cars or take public transport. Machines wash our clothes. We entertain ourselves in front of a TV or computer screen. Fewer people are doing manual work, and most of us have jobs that involve little physical effort. Work, house chores, shopping and other necessary activities are far less demanding than for previous generations.

Recommended physical activity levels

- Children under 5 should do 180 minutes every day.
- Young people (5-18) should do 60 minutes every day.
- Adults (19-64) should do 150 minutes every week.
- Older adults (65 and over) should do 150 minutes every week.

Physical activity for adults

To stay healthy, adults should try to be active daily and should do:

At least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity such as cycling or fast walking every week, and

muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms).

We move around less and burn off less energy than people used to. Research suggests that many adults spend more than seven hours a day sitting down, at work, on transport or in their leisure time. People aged over 65 spend 10 hours or more each day sitting or lying down, making them the most sedentary age group.

Sedentary lifestyles

Inactivity is described by the Department of Health as a “silent killer”. Evidence is emerging that sedentary behaviour, such as sitting or lying down for long periods, is bad for your health. Spending hours sitting down watching TV or playing computer games is thought to increase your risk of many chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes, as well as weight gain and obesity.

Not only should you try to raise your activity levels, but you should also reduce the amount of time you and your family spend sitting down. Common examples of sedentary behaviour include watching TV, using a computer, using the car for short journeys and sitting down to read, talk or listen to music.

How long do you spend sitting?

Recent research suggests people who sit for long periods are more likely to develop conditions such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.

Professor Jerry Morris was the scientist who first demonstrated the link between exercise and health. His research proved for the first time a link between lack of physical exercise and heart disease.

The very first results he got were from the London busmen. There was a striking difference in the heart-attack rate. The drivers of double-decker buses had substantially more, age for age, than the conductors.

The data was so telling because drivers and conductors were men of much the same social class. There was only one obvious difference between them. “The drivers were sedentary,” explains Morris, “and the conductors were unavoidably active. We spent many hours sitting on the buses watching the number of stairs they climbed.” The conductors ascended and descended 500 to 750 steps per working day. And they were half as likely as the drivers to drop dead of a sudden heart attack.

Data arrived for other occupations. Finally, he got the figures for postal workers. “It was strikingly similar!” The postmen who delivered the mail by bike or on foot had fewer heart attacks than sedentary men who served behind counters or as telephonists and clerks. It was true:

exercise prevented heart disease.