



# Getting active for life.

Your guide to an active lifestyle



Finding answers. For life.



## The couch potato epidemic is here

### ***What the numbers say about inactive lifestyle***

Here are some frightening statistics about inactivity in our society:

- Over half of young people ages 5-17 are not active enough for optimal growth and development
- 54% of Canadian women are physically inactive
- 44% of Canadian men are physically inactive
- Only 34% of people over age 65 are active; the fewest in any age group.

Are you active enough? Do you walk, bike or jog a half hour every day? Or go to the community centre for a workout? Choose the stairs instead of the elevator at work? Rake the lawn in autumn?

If you don't, you have lots of company. Many Canadians of all ages aren't active enough to achieve good health.

But being a couch potato is not a harmless lifestyle choice. It's a serious health risk. Research shows that inactive Canadians face an increased risk of obesity, heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other serious diseases.

Lack of physical activity has reached epidemic proportions. Luckily, the solution is just a brisk walk, a bike ride or a dance class away.

# The next best thing to the ‘fountain of youth’

It’s hard to believe just how wonderful physical activity is for health! Regular, daily activity keeps people healthy and reduces the risk of major diseases. It can even slow the physical decline associated with aging, keeping people independent and productive longer.

The benefits begin to add up almost right away. When you become active, you sleep better. You’re more relaxed. You feel renewed, because you’re doing something good for yourself.

And, after about 12 weeks of active living, you’ll notice even more positive changes. You’ll be stronger. You’ll have more energy. You’ll be trimmer, and maybe you’ll have shed a few kilograms. Your posture and balance will have improved. You’ll be in better health, physically and mentally, than when you started. Wow!

Physical activity is a lifesaver. It cuts the risk of heart disease almost in half. That’s partially because it helps control major risk factors for heart disease and stroke, such as high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure and obesity. In fact, physical activity, along with good diet, is the key to controlling obesity.

But wait – it gets even better! Physical activity reduces the risk of cancer, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and arthritis. It also helps fight depression, reduces stress levels and increases your energy.

Not only that, but physical activity can help people avoid bad lifestyle choices such as smoking, drinking or eating too much.

The bottom line is this: to be healthy, you need to be active. That goes for everyone. You are never too young or too old to benefit from physical activity.



## ***How much activity will burn off the calories?***

How long and how hard do you need to exercise to burn off the calories from your morning snack, or tonight’s dinner? Our food and fitness calculator will tell you exactly how many minutes of what activity you need to do to burn off the calories in many popular foods.

To use the calculator, go to the Heart and Stroke Foundation’s Web site at [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca). Search under “Food and fitness calculator”.

# Act now for a long healthy life

Okay, so physical activity is good for you. Just getting into motion can add years to your life – not to mention making you feel better.

But chances are, you knew that already.

So why aren't you active? In today's hectic world, there are a hundred and one good reasons. You're too busy. You're tired at the end of the day. You can't find proper daycare for the kids. You're on a tight budget, so you can't afford membership in a fitness club.

Don't despair! You can choose to make physical activity a part of your life, no matter how busy you are. It doesn't have to be expensive either.

In this booklet you'll find out how to become active and stay active. You'll learn what kind of activities you need to get fit and stay that way – without taking a degree in physical education.

It doesn't matter if you're old or young, if you've never been physically active before, or if you just want to get moving again after a spell of inactivity, this booklet will help set you on the road to active good health. All you need is the commitment to choose an active lifestyle.

Keep reading and find out why – and how – to make physical activity a part of your day-to-day life.



## *How active is your family?*

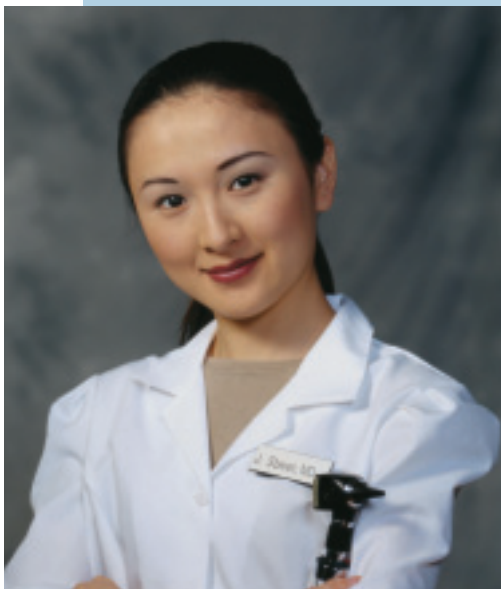
Want to know how your family's level of activity stacks up? Take our interactive quiz and find out! You'll learn just how active your family is, and what steps you can take to boost activity levels.

To take the quiz, go to the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Web site at [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca) and search under "Active Living Quiz".

## Check with your doctor

Before you start any physical activity program, check with your doctor. This step is VERY important if you're over 45, or if you have any medical condition that might get in the way of being active.

Physical activity is almost always healthy. The question is, what activity is best for you? Ask your doctor to recommend activities that suit your age, fitness level and general health. Also, ask if there are activities you must avoid.



## Making small choices for big health gains

To start to live an active life you need to make small, positive choices all day long. Will you take the elevator or use the stairs? Will you drive to the corner store or will you walk? Make healthy choices and you can chalk up a lot of physical activity.

Think about your normal routines. See if you can find some creative ways to inject a little more physical activity into your day. Here's a suggestion: take the "screen time challenge"! Try to free up time by cutting back on television or browsing the Web.

### ***Eight low-cost action choices***

1. Get off the bus or subway a stop earlier and walk
2. Bicycle or walk to work
3. Walk to the corner store, bank or post office
4. Walk the kids to school
5. Park further away and walk
6. Wash the car by hand.
7. Take the stairs instead of the elevator
8. Instead of sitting for a meeting with someone – take a walk while you talk!

*Canada's Physical Activity Guides* have more suggestions on how to work physical activity into your day. See ordering information at the end of this brochure.

## Your action checklist

- Check with your doctor
- Make a list of activities you'd realistically like to take up
- Make a list of goals you'd like to reach through activity
- From these two lists, pick a set of activities
- Do a reality check: make sure your chosen activities fit into available time
- Plan for all seasons
- Plan for unexpected events

## What's your barrier?

We all know activity is good for us – so why aren't we all out there, walking, bicycling and playing Frisbee? Here are the two most common reasons people give for being inactive:

1. Not enough time
2. Not enough energy

Sound familiar? If so, take heart, because these barriers can be overcome. You don't need hours of free time, or the energy of a superhero to get active. You do need a plan and a firm commitment. You've already taken the first step towards an active lifestyle just by reading this booklet. Now take the next.





## Planning ahead for long term success

Get a pencil and paper, and sit down somewhere quiet for fifteen minutes. You're going to make two short lists, then merge them into an action plan. It's as easy as one, two, three...

1. First, list the activities you enjoy AND can realistically do (remember what your doctor said!). Be realistic when you make this list. For instance, if you love golf, but there isn't a golf course within a hundred kilometres of your home, don't add "golf" to your list.

2. Now, make a second list. Write down what you want from your physical activity program. Try to include ALL the benefits you're looking for. Better health will probably be on the list. What about making friends? Learning a new skill? More time enjoying nature? Take time to really think about what should be on this list.

3. Finally, put your two lists together. You want to identify activities that you can do AND that give you the benefits you want. Suppose you identified walking as an activity that interests you, and making friends as one of

your goals. Perhaps you should join a walking club in your area! That way, you can meet people while being active. A walking club doesn't exist? Then think about forming one yourself.

Try to come up with creative solutions. It's vital that you really enjoy the activities you choose. You're in this for the long haul, so you need to choose activities that you find rewarding and fun.

Once you've selected your preferred activities, plan when to fit them into your schedule. Again, be realistic. If you can only spare half an hour on most weekdays, don't plan a physical activity program that requires two hours a day to complete. Obvious? Yes, but many people set themselves up for failure by planning a program that's too ambitious.

Instead, set goals that you can easily reach. Work towards them – and when you reach them, reward yourself! Treat yourself to a movie or take some time out for your favourite hobby. Or, just give yourself a mental pat on the back for sticking with your program.

## Will winter freeze out your physical activity program?

Many people let their activity programs slide during the long, cold winter months. But cold weather doesn't have to send physical activity into hibernation. Far from it! Try swimming at indoor community pools, skating at a public rink or walking (if the weather is poor, go walking in an indoor mall!). For more practical tips and suggestions for winter activities, check out [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca). Search under "Winter Workouts".

## Have a plan for all seasons and all reasons

Take the weather into account when setting up your physical activity program. Don't let a heat wave or a cold spell put an end to your active lifestyle.

Finally, have a backup plan so that unexpected day-to-day events don't derail your physical activity program. With proper planning, you can make sure an office crisis or a traffic jam doesn't come between you and your health goals.

## How much movement is enough?

When you're developing a physical activity program, you need to answer four questions. Here's an easy way to remember the four questions – just think "FITT."

1. **F**requency: how often should you exercise?
2. **I**ntensity: how hard?
3. **T**ime: how long?
4. **T**ype: what sort of activity?

Deciding how often to exercise (Frequency) is easy. Adults need physical activity every day, or at least most days of the week.

Deciding on the daily Intensity and Time of your activity is a little more complicated, because these two things are related. Here's the relationship:

More intensity = less time needed for health benefits

The more intense your activity, the less time you'll need to do it. Your challenge is to find the combination of time and effort that's right for you.

Not everyone wants to work out at maximum intensity all the time. Sometimes an hour of gardening is more appealing than a 20-minute jog in the park. And that's just fine, because they both give you the activity you need for health.



# How intense do you want to get?

Low-intensity activities make you start to feel warm or increase your breathing rate slightly. Walking, volleyball, gardening or stretching all fit in this category. As a general rule, if you're doing a low-intensity activity – one that requires only light effort – you need to do it about 60 minutes a day.

Some people prefer moderate-intensity activities. These cause a noticeable increase in body temperature and breathing rate. Brisk walking, biking, swimming, dancing or water aerobics are all moderate-intensity activities. To stay healthy, you need between 30 and 60 minutes a day of moderate-intensity activity.

Vigorous activity raises breathing rates and body temperature significantly. At this intensity level, you're breathing hard and sweating. Vigorous activities include jogging, basketball, hockey or fast dancing. If you choose to do a vigorous activity, you only need to do 20 to 30 minutes a day to stay healthy.

Don't forget, you can mix and match, varying your level of activity from day to day. There is no "right" combination. As long as you're active, you can choose a mix of intensity and time that works best for you.

## *How long and hard?*

It's up to you! To maximize health benefits, choose between:

- 60 minutes a day of low-intensity activity, *OR*
- 30-60 minutes of moderate activity, *OR*
- 20-30 minutes a day of vigorous activity.



## ***Choose activities with aerobic, flexibility and strength-building benefits***

Many popular exercises combine the three basic activities for maximum benefit.

For instance, walking is an aerobic exercise that helps the heart and lungs work better. But it's also a strength-building activity, because you "carry" the weight of your body. Do a warm-up stretch before you walk, and you've covered all your bases.

## **It all adds up**

Here's more good news: physical activity can be "banked" during the day. That is, you benefit just as much from three, 10-minute spurts of moderate activity as you do from a solid half-hour.

Daily activity doesn't have to come in one big chunk. It can be spread out over the whole day. That makes it a whole lot easier to get the amount of activity you need for health.



## **Different kinds of activities bring different benefits**

The second "T" in FITT stands for **Type** of activity. Experts break physical activity down into three types: aerobic, flexibility and strength-building. Each type of activity has its own unique benefits.

**Aerobic** activities build endurance. They strengthen the heart, lungs and cardiovascular system. Walking, swimming, dancing and jogging are all aerobic activities.

**Flexibility** activities keep you limber. They help relax muscles and keep joints healthy by ensuring your body bends and stretches. Activities that promote flexibility include yoga, Tai Chi, yard work and vacuuming.

**Strength-building** activities are important to maintain strong bones and muscles. In strength-building activities, you work against resistance. Heavy yard work, climbing stairs and weight training are all strength-building exercises.

When you plan your exercise program, try to work all three types of activity into it. A good blend of activity will give you the maximum health benefits for your effort.

## ***Where (and how) should I walk?***

Walking is an easy, low-cost way to combine aerobic and strength-building activities. For useful tips on what to take with you, as well an interactive map with suggestions for walking routes in different parts of Canada, visit the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Web site.

Go to [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca). Search under "Walking routes".

## **On your marks, get set, go slow**

Your doctor has given you the green light. You've picked out the activities you want to get involved with. You're ready to start an active, healthy life.

So start – but start slow! Your body needs time to get used to its healthy new routine. Begin very gently. Gradually increase the length and intensity of your activity.

Make sure to warm up properly. Wear proper clothing and any necessary safety equipment. If you experience chest pain, dizziness or any other warning signs, stop immediately and consult your doctor as soon as possible.

Many people make the mistake of pushing themselves too hard at first. They get tired, stiff and sore because their bodies aren't used to physical activity yet. Worse yet, they become discouraged because they aren't progressing as fast as they think they should.

Adopting an active lifestyle is not something you do overnight. The key is long-term commitment. You're not

trying to win medals or set records. You just need to keep active, day after day, month after month, until activity becomes a way of life.

If you relapse (and you may), don't be discouraged. Everyone gets sick from time to time, or has to deal with a family emergency. Just start your physical activity program up again as soon as you can.



# Make physical activity a family affair

As any parent knows, it's not easy to find time for physical activity. Nor is it always easy to include the kids in activities. But physical activity is not a luxury – it's a basic condition for good health, whether you're a grown-up or just starting grade school.

Parents can help their children towards better health, by encouraging them to take part in physical activity and by being a good role model themselves. Research shows more active parents have more active children.



The best place to start is with activities that can be done as a family. It doesn't have to be expensive or hard to arrange. Take advantage of facilities in your neighbourhood, including parks and community centres.

These are many good ways to exercise close to home, including:

1. Soccer in the park
2. Frisbee
3. Tag
4. Bicycling
5. Walking around the neighbourhood
6. Skipping rope

For more ideas on how to get active with your kids, get the *HeartSmart™ Active Fun Kit for Families*, from the Heart and Stroke Foundation, or Health Canada's *Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth*. See ordering information at the end of this brochure.

## Sample activities for all ages and tastes

Children	Adults	Families	Older Adults
Tag	Brisk walking	Hiking	Walking
Ball hockey	Swimming	Biking	Yoga
Jumping rope	Jogging	Frisbee	Gardening
Tobogganing	Dancing	Soccer	Bowling

# Are the kids too young to join in?

Infants and toddlers can't always participate in family-style physical activity. If your children are very young, consider joining a community centre that offers daycare. That way, you can work out while someone else minds the kids for a little while. Or, take turns babysitting with your spouse, while one of you gets active.

If possible, call on family members or friends to help with the daycare while you exercise. Take turns helping each other to get out – you'll all benefit.

Some parents are embarrassed to ask for help so they can work physical activity into their day. Don't be! You are not being "selfish" when you make time for physical activity. Quite the opposite. Being active helps keep you healthy and energetic, so you'll be there for your family when they need you.

## To stay young, stay active

Physical activity is important to older adults too. In fact, being active is one of the very best things older people can do to keep their bodies – and minds – healthy and youthful. The opposite is also true. Inactivity is a real health hazard, both physically and mentally.

Physical activity builds and maintains strong muscles and bones. It keeps the heart and lungs fit. It limbers up joints to make movement easier. It keeps weight down, reduces stress levels and helps many people relax and sleep better. The list of benefits goes on and on.

Here's something else to think about: active older adults tend to maintain their independence much longer. That's because they can more easily perform basic day-to-day activities like walking, bending, stretching and carrying.

Like everyone else, older adults need to choose activities that offer a blend of aerobic, strength-building and flexibility benefits. Many activities are especially suitable for older adults, because they offer solid health benefits without being too demanding.

*Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults* has more in-depth advice and suggestions on physical activity for older adults. See ordering information at the end of this brochure.



## What about special activity programs for people with heart problems?

If you have a heart problem, but want to be more active, check out our Heart-walk workout program. This is a special exercise program developed by the Heart and Stroke Foundation to help people with heart disease problems get regular, healthy exercise.

Go to [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca). Search under “Heart-walk workout”.

## Older adults can enjoy a wide range of activities

The benefits of physical activity carry over into the senior years. Some popular activities for older adults include:

- Walking
- Mall walking
- Gardening
- Golfing
- Water aerobics
- Bowling
- Tai Chi
- Light weight training
- Light house work

## To sum up: Seize the day, the active way

Physical activity is key to good health. Being active cuts your risk of a whole range of diseases, including heart disease, stroke, cancer and type 2 diabetes. The numbers are in, and the results are clear: active people live longer and enjoy better health.

Not only that, but people who are active feel better, sleep better and have more energy.

You and your family can enjoy the huge benefits of an active lifestyle. All you need is a firm commitment to becoming active.

Check with your doctor. Then, get started!

List the activities you like, and the rewards you want from an active lifestyle. Identify the activities that meet your needs. Then, plan how to make them part of your daily routine.

Start slow and work up gradually. Make sure you have an action plan for each season, so the weather doesn't get in the way. Work physical activity into your daily life in little ways. Remember, it all adds up.

If you “relapse” for a while, don't worry. Just start being active again as soon as you can.

If possible, involve your family and friends in your physical activity program. You'll make it easier for yourself – and you'll be doing them a huge favour as well.

Keep at it, and within three months or even less you'll notice a big difference in your level of fitness. You'll feel better. You'll have more energy. You'll have joined the growing number of Canadians who have taken action for better health. You'll be glad you did.



## For more information on physical activity

If you have a computer, you can access a wealth of information about physical activity. Check out these Web sites for reliable, practical information:

- Heart and Stroke Foundation: [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca).
- Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute: [www.cflri.ca](http://www.cflri.ca)
- Canadian Health Network: [www.canadian-health-network.ca](http://www.canadian-health-network.ca). (Look under *Active Living*.)
- Health Canada: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca). (Click on *Healthy Living* and then *Physical Activity*.)

Many excellent booklets are available to help you learn more about active living. Here is a partial listing of resources.

Booklets/Kits on physical activity available through the Heart and Stroke Foundation by calling 1-888-HSF-INFO (1-888-473-4636)

- *HeartSmart™ Active Fun Kit for Families*
- *Fitness Wheel*
- *Healthy Habits, Healthy Weight*

Booklets available at no cost through Health Canada's Web site [www.paguide.com](http://www.paguide.com) or by calling 1-888-334-9769

- *Canada's Physical Activity Guide*
- *Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults*
- *Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children*
- *Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Youth*

Also available through retail bookstores: *Fit Kids – a practical guide to raising healthy and active children from birth to teens* – Canadian Edition, Mary L. Gavin, Steven A. Dowshen and Neil Itzenberg, The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, 2004, Dorling Kindersley Ltd.



The Heart and Stroke Foundation is a leading funder of heart and stroke research in Canada. The knowledge garnered from Foundation-funded research has resulted in earlier diagnoses, better treatments and new insights into how to prevent and manage these diseases.

To protect your health and the health of those you love, the Foundation also provides millions of Canadians with the most up-to-date healthy living information, based on the most current, evidence-based research.

Your participation in local Heart and Stroke Foundation events such as Jump Rope for Heart™ and Mother Daughter Walk for Heart and Stroke™ not only supports physical activity in your community, but also is key in raising the funds to sustain research and health information development. You're at the heart of all we do!

To find out more about Heart and Stroke Foundation prevention or disease-related information, and to learn how you can offer much-needed support in your community, visit [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca) or call 1-888-HSF-INFO (1-888-473-4636).

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