

Physical inactivity is now identified as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. Physical inactivity levels are rising in many countries with major implications for the prevalence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and the general health of the population worldwide.

The significance of physical activity on public health, the global mandates for the work carried out by WHO in relation to promotion of physical activity and NCD prevention, and the limited existence of national guidelines on physical activity for health in low- and middle-income countries make evident the need for the development of global recommendations that address the links between the frequency, duration, intensity, type and total amount of physical activity needed for the prevention of NCDs.

The focus of The Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health is primary prevention of NCDs through physical activity at population level, and the primary target audience for these recommendations are policy-makers at national level.

Overall, across all the age groups, the benefits of implementing the above recommendations, and of being physically active, outweigh the harms. At the recommended level of 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity activity, musculoskeletal injury rates appear to be uncommon. In a population-based approach, in order to decrease the risks of musculoskeletal injuries, it is appropriate to encourage a moderate start with gradual progress to higher levels of physical activity.

### Physical activity should not be mistaken for sport

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by the skeletal muscles that uses energy. This includes sports, exercise and other activities such as playing, walking, doing household chores or gardening.

### What is Moderate-intensity and Vigorous-intensity Physical Activity?

Intensity refers to the rate at which the activity is being performed. It can be thought of as "how hard a person works to do the activity". The intensity of different forms of physical activity varies between people. Depending on an individual's relative level of fitness, examples of moderate physical activity could include: brisk walking, dancing or household chores. Examples of vigorous physical activity could be: running, fast cycling, fast swimming or moving heavy loads.

### What does accumulating physical activity throughout the week mean?

The concept of accumulation refers to meeting the goal of 60 minutes per day or 150 minutes per week by performing activities in multiple shorter bouts spread throughout the day. For example, to meet the goal of 60 minutes of physically activity daily, children can do two bouts of 30 minutes in different times of the day. Likewise, adults can meet the 150 minutes weekly goal by doing 30 minutes of physical activity five times per week.

### Doing some physical activity is better than doing none

Inactive people should start with small amounts of physical activity and gradually increase duration, frequency and intensity over time. Inactive adults, older adults and those with disease limitations will have added health benefits when they become more active.

For further information see:  
<http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/pa/en/index.html>  
or contact WHO on [dietandhealth@who.int](mailto:dietandhealth@who.int)



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# GLOBAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR HEALTH



## Recommendations for 5-17 years old:

For children and young people, physical activity includes play, games, sports, transportation, chores, recreation, physical education, or planned exercise, in the context of family, school, and community activities.

The recommendations to improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, bone health, and cardiovascular and metabolic health biomarkers are:

1. Children and youth aged 5–17 should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily.
2. Amounts of physical activity greater than 60 minutes provide additional health benefits.
3. Most of the daily physical activity should be aerobic. Vigorous-intensity activities should be incorporated, including those that strengthen muscle and bone, at least 3 times per week.

The benefits of being physically active outweigh the harms. Any existing risk can be reduced by a progressive increase in the activity level, especially in children and young people who are inactive.

For activities that can pose risks of injuries, the use of protective equipment such as helmets should be encouraged.



## Recommendations for 18-64 years old:

In adults aged 18–64, physical activity includes leisure time physical activity, transportation (e.g. walking or cycling), occupational (i.e. work), household chores, play, games, sports or planned exercise, in the context of daily, family, and community activities.

The recommendations to improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, bone health, reduce the risk of NCDs and depression are:

1. Adults aged 18–64 should accumulate 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.
2. Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes duration.
3. For additional health benefits, adults should increase their moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes per week, or engage in 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity.
4. Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week.



## Recommendations for 65 years and above:

In older adults of the 65 years and above age group, physical activity includes leisure time physical activity, transportation (e.g. walking or cycling), occupational (if the individual is still engaged in work), household chores, play, games, sports or planned exercise, in the context of daily, family, and community activities.

The recommendations to improve muscular and cardiorespiratory fitness, bone and functional health, reduce the risk of NCDs, depression and cognitive decline are:

1. Older adults should accumulate 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.
2. Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes duration.
3. For additional health benefits, older adults should increase their moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes per week, or engage in 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity.
4. Older adults, with poor mobility, should perform physical activity to enhance balance and prevent falls on 3 or more days per week.
5. Muscle-strengthening activities, involving major muscle groups, should be done on 2 or more days a week.
6. When older adults cannot do the recommended amounts of physical activity due to health conditions, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow.

