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Benefits of Physical Activity



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A large amount of studies clearly demonstrates that participating in regular physical activity provides many health benefits. These benefits occur in generally healthy people, in people at risk of developing chronic diseases, and in people with current chronic conditions or disabilities. These benefits are summarised in Table 2.1 which is adopted from the Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee of the United States (1).

Although some health benefits seem to begin with as little as 60 mins (1 hour) a week, research shows that a total amount 150 mins (2 hrs and 30 mins) a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, such as brisk walking, consistently reduces the risk of many chronic diseases and other adverse health outcomes (1-3). Table 2.2 further gives an overview of research findings on the general relationship between physical activity and health (1).

Table 2.1 Health Benefits Associated With Regular Physical Activity*

Adults and Older Adults [#]	
Strong evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower risk of premature death • Lower risk of coronary heart disease • Lower risk of stroke • Lower risk of high blood pressure • Lower risk of adverse blood lipid profile • Lower risk of type 2 diabetes • Lower risk of metabolic syndrome • Lower risk of colon cancer • Lower risk of breast cancer • Prevention of weight gain • Weight loss, particularly when combined with reduced calorie intake • Improved cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness • Prevention of falls • Reduced depression • Better cognitive function (for older adults)
Moderate to strong evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better functional health (for older adults) • Reduced abdominal obesity
Moderate evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced symptoms of depression • Lower risk of hip fracture • Lower risk of lung cancer • Lower risk of endometrial cancer • Weight maintenance after weight loss • Increased bone density • Improved sleep quality

Children and Adolescents

Strong evidence

- Improved cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness
- Improved bone health
- Improved cardiovascular and metabolic health biomarkers e.g. blood pressure and BMI
- Favourable body composition

Moderate evidence

- Reduced symptoms of depression

The term "Older Adult" is defined here as people ≥ 65 years and people 50 to 64 years with clinically significant conditions or physical limitations that affect movement, physical fitness or physical activity.

Table 2.2 Physical Activity and Health - Major Research Findings

- Regular physical activity reduces the risk of many adverse health outcomes (See Table 2.1 for more details).
- Most health benefits occur with at least 150 mins a week of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. Additional benefits occur with more physical activity.
- For most health outcomes, additional benefits occur as the amount of physical activity increases through higher intensity, greater frequency, and/or longer duration.
- Some physical activity is better than none.
- Both aerobic (endurance) and muscle-strengthening (resistance) physical activity are beneficial.
- Health benefits occur for children and adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, older adults, and those in every studied racial and ethnic group.
- The health benefits of physical activity occur for people with disabilities.
- At the population level, benefits of physical activity far outweigh the possibility of adverse outcomes.

References

1. Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee (PAGAC). *Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Report 2008*. Washington: DC, US Department of Health and Human Services; 2008.
2. Haskell WL, Lee IM, Pate RR, Powell KE, Blair SN, Franklin BA, Macera CA, Heath GW, Thompson PD, Bauman A; American College of Sports Medicine; American Heart Association. Physical activity and public health: updated recommendation for adults from the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association. *Circulation* 2007;Aug;28;116(9):1081-93.
3. World Health Organisation. *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health*. Geneva: World Health Organisation;2010.