

What is the impact of physical inactivity on the heart?

In the UK, people who are not physically active are **twice as likely** to have a heart attack compared with those who do regular physical activity. People who do regular physical activity **halve** their risk of dying from cardiovascular disease compared with inactive people¹.

In England, around seven in every ten adults don't do enough physical activity to achieve the health benefits².

The type of activity recommended for the heart is moderate, rhythmic (aerobic) exercise such as **brisk walking, cycling or swimming**. Walking is particularly good as you can often build it into your daily routine.

Are there any practical tips on how to get active?

Do at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a day on at least five days a week.

'Moderate-intensity activity' means that the activity should make you feel warm and breathe more heavily than normal, but you should still be able to talk. This amount of activity will help protect your heart and help to protect you against coronary heart disease. However, if you are not used to this amount of activity, it is important that you build up to this level over a period of time. You can do the 30 minutes all in one go, or in shorter bouts of at least 10 minutes.

Be active as often as possible. You can get the benefit of being more active from things you do every day – such as walking, doing vigorous housework, heavy digging in the garden, or climbing stairs. Any increase in activity will benefit your health. And everyone can benefit, whatever your level of mobility, fitness or your age. It's never too late to start.

Avoid sitting for long periods. Break up these long periods at least every 30 minutes. For example, when you're watching TV, get up and walk around during the adverts.

Make activity part of your social life. For example, when you go to your local cinema, walk there.

Do a variety of activities – for example, walking, swimming, gym sessions or tennis – to keep it interesting.

What do you need to remember when you're doing activities?

- Gradually build up the amount of activity you do by starting slowly at a level that suits you, and then gradually build up the time you spend doing the activity and how often you do it.
- Each time you exercise, start slowly for the first few minutes and build up gradually. When you stop exercising, spend some time going more slowly and cooling down.
- Avoid doing activities after a large meal, or when it is very cold or very hot, or at high altitudes.
- Don't exercise if you feel unwell.
- Stop exercising if you feel tired, breathless, dizzy or sick, or if you have pain or feel unwell in any way, and contact your doctor for advice.
- If you have coronary heart disease or any condition for which you are taking prescribed medicine, get advice from your GP before you start exercising.
- Always check with your GP if you're not sure about how much or what sort of exercise you should be doing.

For more information

bhf.org.uk

BHF Heart Helpline: 0300 330 3311 – for information and support on anything related to heart health.

This service is available in English only. Phone lines open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, similar cost to 01 or 02 numbers.

BHF booklets:

Looking after your heart (aimed at South Asians, in English and five South Asian languages)

Get active, stay active (in English)

Put your heart into walking (in English)

Physical activity and your heart (in English)

To order these *free* resources, call the **BHF Orderline** on **0870 600 6566**

Other organisations:

www.activeplaces.com – a database of information on sports facilities in England.

www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk – visit the Walking for Health website to find your local health walk scheme (with limited information in some South Asian languages).

1. Department of Health. 2004. At Least Five a Week. Evidence on the Impact of Physical Activity and Its Relationship to Health. A Report from the Chief Medical Officer. London: Department of Health.
2. Department of Health. 2005. Health Survey for England 2004. London: TSO.