Promoting physical activity complements national strategies to improve nutrition, and to reduce tobacco, drug and alcohol use. It also impacts positively on efforts to enhance social environments through reduced violence and improved social interaction and integration. These widespread benefits underline the need to establish and integrate public policy on physical activity in the context of health, education, environment, sport and transport at national and local levels.

The publication of The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland is an important step in this process. The guidelines establish a national consensus, based on international expert opinion and evidence, on appropriate levels of health enhancing physical activity for the Irish population.

We would like to thank the National Physical Activity Guidelines Steering Group for their hard work and dedication in developing the guidelines. They present clear, concise and user-friendly guidance to support the public, professionals and policy makers in promoting physical activity across the population.

Despite the overwhelming evidence, much of our population is not sufficiently active to reap the health gain of physical activity. While increased physical activity levels benefit all, there is strong evidence that the greatest health benefits occur when the least active in the population become moderately active. The translation of these guidelines into action presents a unique opportunity to focus our efforts on a shared vision and framework for action to support everyone – children, young people, adults, older people and people with disabilities – to be as active as they can and enjoy the innumerable benefits.

Therefore, the challenge is to consider how you, your colleagues and your organisation and community can contribute to this important task. We encourage you to identify opportunities for empowering and supporting people to achieve their goal of being active every day in as many ways as they can.

---

Dr Tony Holohan    Dr Patrick Doorley
Chief Medical Officer    National Director – Population Health
Department of Health and Children    Health Service Executive

Published by:
The Department of Health and Children
The Health Service Executive

Department of Health and Children, Health Service Executive (2009)
The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland

www.getirelandactive.ie
Being physically active is one of the most important steps that people of all ages can take to improve their health. A mixture of physical activity that increases fitness as well as strengthening muscle and bone provides the most benefit.

Physical activity is for everyone and any level of activity is better for health than none.

For more health benefits, you should increase your aerobic activity to 60 minutes a day of moderate activity 5 days a week.

If you have a diagnosed chronic condition such as diabetes, heart disease, or osteoarthritis or if you have symptoms such as chest pain or pressure, dizziness or joint pain, talk to your doctor before increasing your activity levels.

You can do moderate or vigorous activities or a combination of both. One minute of vigorous activity counts as two minutes of moderate activity.

People are most responsive to messages that:

1. Stress the benefits of physical activity
2. Promote self belief
3. Promote social support
4. Suggest ways to fit physical activity into everyday life.

- Be active for reasons that are important to you – better health, manage weight, feel better.
- Start slowly, set realistic goals to increase your chances of success.
- Choose an activity you enjoy – fun and enjoyment are important.
- Don’t do it alone – ask family and friends for support. Check out what local organisations and clubs have to offer.
- You don’t have to do it all at once, build up to 30 minutes by being active for at least 10 minutes several times a day.

The benefits of physical activity – summary of evidence

US Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008

Strong evidence of:
- better cardio-respiratory and muscular fitness
- stronger bones
- better cardiovascular and metabolic health
- healthier body fat composition
- reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression

Some evidence of:
- lower risk of high blood pressure
- lower risk of unhealthy blood lipid profile
- lower risk of type 2 diabetes
- lower risk of metabolic syndrome
- lower risk of colon and breast cancer
- fewer falls
- reduced levels of depression
- better cognitive function in older adults
- stronger bones
- better sleep quality
- reduced abdominal fat

Promoting Physical Activity in Ireland

Guidelines for losing weight and keeping it off (adults)

To avoid gaining weight:
- 60 minutes moderate intensity physical activity at least 5 days a week is required.
- If you have lost a significant amount of weight you may need 60 to 90 minutes moderate intensity physical activity at least 5 days a week.

To lose weight:
- 60 to 75 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity at least 5 days a week may be required.

The amount of physical activity required depends on the individual as well as the amount of weight loss required. Dietary changes may also be required.

If you are extremely inactive or have a high BMI (30 or above) start exercising in bouts of 10 minutes or less and progressively increase the duration, and then the intensity of activity until you reach the adult guidelines.

For more information

Visit www.getirelandactive.ie for full details of The National Physical Activity Guidelines for Ireland

Information, training and support to promote physical activity is available from:
- Health Promotion Departments – visit www.healthpromotion.ie or contact HSE Infoline for local contact details.
- Irish Heart Foundation – visit www.irishheart.ie for more information.

National Physical Activity Guidelines for Ireland

Executive summary

A mixture of physical activity that increases fitness as well as strengthening muscle and bone provides the most benefit.

For adults this can include organized activities such as exercise classes, team sports and active leisure activities such as walking, gardening and active housework. For children active play, PE classes at school and organized activities all provide benefits.

You don’t have to do it all at once, build up to 30 minutes by being active for at least 10 minutes several times a day.

Short bouts of at least 10 minutes can be accumulated.

Vigorous activity
- Heart is beating much faster than normal, breathing is much harder than normal.
- At least 60 minutes vigorous intensity activity, or as much as ability allows

Moderate activity
- Heart is beating faster than normal, breathing is harder than normal.
- At least 30 minutes moderate intensity activity, or as much as ability allows

For children and young people

- All activity no matter how short counts

Moderate activity

Children and young people
- All at least 60 minutes moderate intensity activity
- Every day of the week

Children and young people with disabilities
- All at least 60 minutes moderate intensity activity
- Every day of the week

Adults
- All at least 30 minutes moderate intensity activity
- 5 days a week

People with disabilities
- All at least 30 minutes moderate intensity activity
- 5 days a week

Older people
- All at least 30 minutes moderate intensity activity
- 5 days a week

Information, training and support to promote physical activity is available from:
- Health Promotion Departments
- Local Sports Partnerships
- Irish Heart Foundation

Some evidence of:
- lower risk of hip fracture
- lower risk of lung cancer
- lower risk of endometrial cancer
- stronger bone density
- better sleep quality
- reduced abdominal fat

Strong evidence of:
- lower risk of coronary heart disease
- lower risk of high blood pressure
- lower risk of unhealthy blood lipid profile
- lower risk of type 2 diabetes
- lower risk of metabolic syndrome
- lower risk of colon and breast cancer
- fewer falls
- reduced levels of depression
- better cognitive function in older adults
- stronger bones
- better sleep quality
- reduced abdominal fat

Strong evidence of:
- lower risk of hip fracture
- lower risk of lung cancer
- lower risk of endometrial cancer
- stronger bone density
- better sleep quality
- reduced abdominal fat

Some evidence of:
- lower risk of hip fracture
- lower risk of lung cancer
- lower risk of endometrial cancer
- stronger bone density
- better sleep quality
- reduced abdominal fat

For all activity no matter how short counts.

You can do moderate or vigorous activities or a combination of both. One minute of vigorous activity counts as two minutes of moderate activity.