Reduce your risk of cancer: physical activity

Key messages

• Move more and sit less! Have fun and be active every day.

• Physical activity includes our daily activities like walking to work, housework and taking the stairs at work, as well as sporting activities like cycling and rugby.

• Being active is one of the most important things you can do to reduce your risk of cancer, especially bowel, post-menopausal breast and endometrial cancers.

• It’s never too late to increase your levels of physical activity.

Physical activity is important for health. Being physically active can help lower your risk of heart disease, diabetes and some cancers. Any amount of activity is good, but if you are inactive now, start slowly.

Regular physical activity is an essential part of a healthy cancer protective lifestyle. Healthy living includes: eating well, maintaining a healthy body weight, reducing the amount of alcohol you drink, not smoking and protecting yourself from the sun.

Keeping active may reduce your risk of cancers of the colon, breast and endometrium (lining of the womb) [1]. Up to a quarter of these cancers might be due to not doing enough physical activity [2].

It also helps prevent weight gain. This means it may also reduce your risk of weight-related cancers, such as cancers of the oesophagus, pancreas, liver, bowel, breast, kidney and endometrium [1].

Physical activity is anything that moves your body and burns calories. Being physically active can include:
• active transportation such as walking and cycling;
• chores around the home including cleaning and gardening;
• physical activity at work such as lifting and climbing stairs;
• play, games, gym, sports, at home, school and in the community.

Physical activity provides health benefits if it is done often enough, for long enough and at the right intensity [3].

What intensity is

The activities you do may be of:

Light-intensity, such as casual walking and gardening

Moderate intensity activities include brisk walking and kapa haka. Your heart will beat faster and you’ll breathe harder
than normal, but you’ll still be able to talk.

Vigorous intensity activities, including running and lap swimming require more effort. You’ll probably sweat, your heart will beat a lot faster and you won’t be able to talk much without getting out of breath.

Physical activity recommendations

Adults

- Aim for at least 2.5 hours of moderate-intensity activity spread throughout the week or 1 hour and 15 minutes per week of vigorous activity, or a combination of both, spread throughout the week.
- Add moderate- to high-intensity muscle-strengthening activity (e.g. climbing stairs and hills, weights, dance, yoga) on at least 2 days per week.
- Gain even more benefit by being active at least 5 hours per week.
- Spend less time sitting. If your work involves sitting for prolonged periods of time, you can interrupt this by getting up to speak on the phone, holding a walking meeting, taking the stairs or parking further away from work.
- No matter what your age, you can gain benefits from exercise. Aim to build it up over time.
- Getting bored? Try to mix up your routine, get outside into nature or be active with friends.

Children and young people

- Children 1-5 years should be physically active and have plenty of opportunities to move throughout the day. Try new things such as dancing with music.
- Children 6-17 years should get at least 1 hour per day of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity e.g. skateboarding, playing outside.
- Provide kids with opportunities to be active.
- Include vigorous-intensity activity on at least 3 days per week e.g. skipping, biking, and dancing.
- Include muscle- and bone-strengthening (weight-bearing) activities on at least 3 days per week e.g. running, jumping rope and bouncing on a trampoline.
- limit screen-time

These recommendations are based on the NZ Physical Activity Guidelines. For more information, visit the Ministry of Health Manatū Hauora website: [https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/physical-activity](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/physical-activity)

Handy hints

- Sit less, move more
- Do at least 2½ hours of moderate or 1¼ hours of vigorous physical activity spread throughout the week
- For extra health benefits, aim for 5 hours of moderate or 2½ hours of vigorous physical activity spread throughout the week
- Do muscle strengthening activities on at least 2 days each week
- Doing some physical activity is better than doing none
- Make it fun!
- Walk and bike to work, or park further away
- Play active games with your tamariki
- Explore local walkways and cycle trails
- Take a dog for a walk- or borrow one!
- Try a new hobby – dancing, gardening, tramping or a new social sport
Help and support for you and your whānau

• Get motivated by using a Mhealth phone app – visit Health Navigator NZ app library or VicHealth Healthy Living Apps Guide. One example is the OL@-OR@ health app for Māori and Pasifika that provided information and support for improving hauora.

• Visit sportnz.org.nz to find a sport or leisure activity in your local area that suits you – ranging from biking to waka ama
• Talk to your GP or practice nurse about a Green Prescription (GRx)
• Visit healthykids.org.nz for family activity ideas and tools
• Visit wellplace.co.nz for information on ways to develop a healthy workplace

Promoting physical activity in Aotearoa New Zealand

• Limit the volume and speed of traffic in public spaces
• Plan enjoyable, safe and connected built environments and accessible public spaces, such as visible stairs, good cycle ways and walking paths
• Provide accessible, safe parks and sports and leisure facilities
• Increase the number of health promoting schools and workplaces

References

