Be active for life
Over 50? Keep your heart healthy with physical activity
Be active – a little effort makes a big difference

Whatever your age, size or physical condition, you are likely to benefit from being more active. The people who benefit the most are inactive people who start to take regular, moderate activity. You can be active without ever slipping into lycra or joining a gym.

You’ll benefit as much from brisk walking, or activities like gardening and climbing stairs. The information, practical tips and questions and answers in this guide will help you understand more about physical activity and how you can be active.

As you get older, it’s especially important to stay active.
We understand that it may seem difficult to fit physical activity into your daily life due to time and other constraints. We’ve produced this guide to help you succeed in living your life as actively as possible, for the rest of your life. You can fill in the sections as you go along. If you are under 50 or interested in walking, see our other publications on page 86.

If you have a heart condition or you are at high risk of developing heart disease – for example because you have high blood pressure – we suggest you read our booklet called *Physical activity and your heart*. See page 86 for more information and how to order the booklet.

Many health problems can be helped by regular physical activity, but if you have a health problem, check with your doctor about the amount and type of activity that is suitable for you.

This guide does not replace the advice your health professionals may give you based on their knowledge of your condition.
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Get active. Top tips to get you started

Getting started is easier than you think. Changing a few daily habits can soon add up to a more active lifestyle. Be active as often as possible.
Move more often
Recognise the activity that you are already doing and build on this.

Start small and progress at your own rate
Don’t be over-ambitious. Make sure you set yourself targets that you can easily achieve – things that you can keep doing and can become part of your everyday routine.

Get into the habit
No matter how small, plan an activity routine for yourself. Plan a time in your day when you will do your activity. Use your diary or a calendar if it helps. If you’re a morning person, why not get up that bit earlier and fit some activity in before you start your day?

Walk more each day
Walk all or part of the way to the shops or to the local leisure centre, or go out at any time to get some fresh air. You can walk socially with your friends and family, and if you have a dog you can take the dog for a walk. If you’re still working, go for a lunchtime walk with your colleagues.

Climb more stairs
Look for every opportunity to use the stairs instead of the lift or escalator, or walk up the escalator. Walking up and down stairs makes your muscles and bones stronger, and prevents thinning of the bones (osteoporosis).

Active travel
Walk or cycle part or all of the way to the shops or to meet friends, get off the bus a stop earlier, or park your car further away from the entrance to where you are going.

Avoid sitting for long periods
Break up sitting periods every 30 minutes – for example, while watching TV, reading a book, at the computer, or when you are driving.

Make an active date
Arrange to meet with a friend on a regular basis to be active together. Keeping each other company will keep you both motivated. Put some dates in your diary!
INACTIVE PEOPLE ARE AT TWICE THE RISK OF DYING FROM CORONARY HEART DISEASE...
Why is it worth being active?

The facts…

- Physical inactivity is a major health risk and one of the main causes of death and disability in the developed countries of the world.¹

- Coronary heart disease is the most common cause of death in the UK. Around one in five men and one in seven women die from the disease.²

- Physical inactivity is responsible for over one in five people in developed countries getting coronary heart disease.¹

- Inactive people have twice the risk of dying from coronary heart disease compared with active people.³

- Physical activity levels are low in the UK. About six out of ten men and seven out of ten women are not active enough to give themselves protection against coronary heart disease.⁴

Did you know?

Four in ten people with coronary heart disease die because of physical inactivity.⁵
The benefits of being active

The health benefits of being active are well established. Physical activity can help prevent and manage a variety of health conditions and improve the way you look and feel on a daily basis, protecting your health both now and in the future.³

The long-term and short-term health benefits of physical activity are listed below. **Tick which ones are important to you.**
Physical activity helps to prevent illness in the long term by reducing the risk of:
- coronary heart disease and stroke
- high blood pressure
- type 2 diabetes
- some cancers (such as colon cancer)
- obesity
- dementia and Alzheimer’s disease

It helps to manage and control:
- coronary heart disease, including angina
- weight (and body fat)
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol levels
- type 2 diabetes
- arthritis

It has beneficial effects on the health of the bones and muscles, reducing the risk of:
- osteoporosis
- osteoarthritis
- back pain
- falls and injuries

And it also:
- maintains joint mobility and suppleness
- improves balance, posture and co-ordination
- makes it easier to carry out your everyday activities
- helps you stay independent and mobile in later life.

Being active will make a difference to the quality of your life – that means how you feel, both physically and mentally, on a daily basis.
You can expect to see many of these short-term health benefits within weeks of starting to be more active:
- more energy
- less stress and anxiety
- more relaxed
- better body shape and appearance
- that you sleep better
- that you can concentrate more easily
- increased enjoyment – activity can be great fun and something you can do with other people.

As you get older, regular physical activity also helps you to stay in touch with friends and neighbours – for example, going to the shops or visiting family or friends.

Why is it worth being active?
The more active or fit you are, the lower your risk of heart disease.
How much should I do?

To keep your heart, lungs, muscles and bones in good working order and to experience the health benefits of physical activity, you should do a total of at least 30 minutes of at least moderate-intensity physical activity a day, on five or more days a week.¹³

Moderate-intensity physical activity means working hard enough to make you breathe more heavily than normal and become slightly warmer, but not so hard that you are unable to talk and exercise at the same time, or that you become exhausted. If you are very unfit or overweight, or if you have a health problem, you may only have to walk up a slope to experience these feelings. But if you are very fit, you may be able to run quite fast before the feelings become noticeable.

If you want to lose weight or manage your weight, see pages 13–15 to find out how much activity you should do.