Good news about physical activity

- It helps keep your heart strong and healthy, and reduces your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.
- It can help you lose weight and improve your figure.
- It helps you to relax, cope with stress and sleep well at night.
- It gives you the energy to do other things you enjoy.
- It helps you to look and feel younger.
- It does not have to mean strenuous sports or workouts.
- It does not mean joining expensive clubs or classes.
- Half an hour's moderate exercise a day can make all the difference.
- It can be beneficial for everyone regardless of your age, size or shape, or whether you have a disability.

There are lots of different get-fit activities that you can try. This booklet suggests some of the best ways to get started.

What's in it for you?

Good fun, a healthier heart and a fitter body

Everyone can benefit from exercise, whatever your age and no matter how unfit you feel at the moment. The best form of exercise is one that you really enjoy and can fit into your daily routine. This way, once you have started, you won't be tempted to find an excuse for not keeping it up.

Claude Meyers, who is retired and lives in Rechil, Surrey, enjoys swimming at his local pool.

Kathy Tuckley from Bristol says...

"I aim to fit some exercise into my routine at least twice a week as it helps to keep my mind alert for all the studying I have to do. I particularly enjoy lacrosse and aerobics."

More about team games on page 12.

Pauline works in a busy London office.

"I enjoy keeping fit and healthy by exercising regularly."

Check the cycling tips on pages 8 and 9.
Why should you exercise?

By gradually building up the amount of activity you do, you will improve your body’s suppleness, strength and stamina. Your muscles will become firmer and stronger and your heart and lungs will function more efficiently. Other parts of the body such as the liver and the nervous system also benefit from exercise.

Taking up a new activity can also help you forget the stresses and strains of the day and help you to sleep more soundly.

Many activities, such as dancing or playing tennis, can help improve your posture, co-ordination and reflexes as well.

So you can see that exercise is an excellent all-round tonic!

Why is exercise good for your heart?

Your heart is the muscle that pumps vital supplies of oxygen-rich blood around your body. Regular exercise makes your heart grow stronger, so that it can pump more blood with each beat. This means that your heart does not have to work so hard to do its job.

Exercises that help your heart are the ones that make you work hard. They are often called ‘aerobic’ exercises because they have you breathe in enough oxygen to supply your working muscles. Aerobic exercises, like cycling, running and swimming, help to build up your stamina – your ability to keep going without getting too puffing out.

The health experts are finding more and more evidence to show that exercise is an important way of protecting yourself against heart disease, and that not doing enough physical activity may be as harmful to your heart as smoking or high cholesterol.

See also Other ways to help your heart on page 13.

How can exercise aid your recovery?

If you are recovering from heart surgery or heart surgery, exercise can help you to return to a full and active life, and may help to prevent further damage to your heart. Many hospitals offer patients a cardiac rehabilitation programme which includes a set plan of exercise and advice on diet, relaxation and how to enjoy a healthy lifestyle.

What can exercise do for children?

Exercise is beneficial to children in all the same ways that it is for adults. If children are encouraged to enjoy physical activities at an early age, they are more likely to continue exercising regularly throughout their lives and lower their risk of developing heart disease later on. Why not take up an activity that you can all enjoy as a family – like swimming or cycling?
Ready...

Think about how much physical activity you have done over the past week. How many times can you remember doing anything for about half an hour that made you a little breathless? The chances are you are probably not doing enough. To get the real benefits, you need to choose an activity and do it for about half an hour a day. It should be strenuous enough to make you slightly breathless.

Try to think of exercise as a natural, essential part of your life—just like eating or sleeping.

How to get started

✓ Choose which activity you are going to take up to get fit, decide when and where you're going to do it. Make sure you choose an activity you can do regularly. (You can, of course, choose more than one.)
✓ Pick a day to begin your new, active lifestyle and write it in your diary. Plan at least three times in the following week when you are going to do your activity.
✓ Ask a friend or colleague to join you and make exercise part of your social life.
✓ Set yourself realistic goals, but don't lose heart if you don't succeed at first. Check your chosen activity and your schedule—and try again as soon as you can.
✓ Remember, even if you feel a little too busy to exercise, you can probably fit in a little extra walking into your routine, for example on your journey to work or a trip to the shops. Why not try using the stairs instead of a lift or escalator? It will really help.

If you are not used to exercise, it is important to take it slowly at first and build up your fitness gradually. If you start to feel pain or get very tired, don't push yourself. Stop and rest for a while. After just a week, you will be amazed at how much fitter you feel.

Most people don't need a check-up before they start to get fit. But if you are in any doubt or are overweight, very unfit, recovering from flu or a dental infection, or if you have any of the conditions listed below, ask your doctor about the best form of exercise for you.

SPECIAL TIPS

✓ Before starting any vigorous activity, always warm up with some gentle running on the spot and stretching.
✓ You don't need to buy expensive sportswear. Just remember to wear loose, comfortable clothes when you exercise, and wear a good pair of training shoes which give strong support to your heels and arches.
✓ To find out about the activities available in your area, ask at your local library or contact the Leisures or Recreation Department of your Local Authority (in the phone book under the name of your Local Authority).
✓ Treat yourself to something new to start you off—like a new track suit, leotard or pair of cycling shorts.

Start to feel pain or get very tired, don't push yourself. Stop and rest for a while. After just a week, you will be amazed at how much fitter you feel.

Are you doing enough?

When you start a new activity it is important to start off slowly and build up your exercise time gradually. This will help your body to adapt to the new demands put upon it. The chart below shows you how to increase the time you spend walking and swimming.

STEADY...

Try to fit some physical activity into your daily routine.

HEALTH TIPS

Heart disease
High blood pressure
Back problems
Arthritis or joint pain
Diabetes

Cut out the alcohol which can increase your heart rate and blood pressure. Cut down on fatty foods which can increase your cholesterol levels. If you are overweight, you will put your heart under more pressure and increase your risk of heart disease. If you are hypertensive, stop smoking, eat less salt and less fat, and you will decrease your risk of heart disease and stroke. If you are arthritic or have joint pain, try to keep your weight down and be gentle with your joints. If you are diabetic, you must control your sugar level. If you are diabetic, you must control your sugar level. If you are diabetic, you must control your sugar level. If you are diabetic, you must control your sugar level.

SWIMMING

WEEKS 1 AND 2

Walk or swim across the width of the pool continuously for 5 minutes. On each subsequent journey increase your pace slightly, aiming to do it in 6 minutes by the end of week 2.

WEEKS 3 AND 4

Outward journey 10 minutes. On each subsequent journey increase your pace slightly, aiming to do it in 9 minutes by the end of week 4.

WEEKS 5 AND 6

On your outward journey walk slowly for 12 minutes. On each subsequent journey increase your pace slightly, aiming to do it in 11 minutes by the end of week 6.

WEEKS 7 AND 8

Outward journey 12 minutes, alternating a brisk walk with your normal pace. On each subsequent journey increase your pace slightly.

Go!
**TAKE A HIKE**

Walking is a great way to get fit. As long as it's brisk (aim to do a mile in about 15 minutes), walking will build up your stamina and strengthen your leg muscles.

- **Free**
- Saves you money on petrol and bus or train fares.
- Saves you time stuck in queues and traffic jams.
- An ideal way to explore the countryside, or discover the parks and places of interest in your area.
- **An activity which people of all ages can enjoy.** Many older people find walking helps them to keep active and mobile.
- **A great way for families to get fit together.**

**PEDAL POWER**

If you want a reliable mode of transport that is cheap, fast, healthy and kind to the environment, take to your wheels!

- **Cycling is:** becoming one of the most popular sports and a 'green' alternative to the cars that pollute our streets.
  - If you don't already have a bike, you can buy a secondhand one fairly cheaply. Look in the classified ads in your local newspaper, or on the notebordads at local newspapers. Bikes are cheap to maintain.
  - Cycling builds up your stamina and strengthens your muscles. It can also help you to lose weight.
  - You can cycle in a one or around town, on or to places of interest in the countryside. Should be some cycling rides that you can join that give an opportunity to travel and cycle together. For more information about cycle routes, contact the local cycling club. Cycling can be an enjoyable way to explore your area and enjoys cycling with others.

**Exploring the countryside - and getting fit.**

- If you are not used to long walks, try a little walking to your journey every day. For example, take the stairs instead of using the lift or escalator, or get off the bus or train one stop sooner and walk the rest of the way.
- If you are a keen cyclist, you can try cycling to your journey every day. For example, take the stairs instead of using the lift or escalator, or get off the bus or train one stop sooner and walk the rest of the way.

- **Cycling can be an enjoyable way to keep fit, but be sure to follow the safety rules.**

**Be seen to be safe**

Cycling is safe, as long as you maintain your bike carefully, follow the Highway Code (copies available from newsagents), and make sure you are visible, especially if you cycle at night. Always wear a cycling helmet and a reflective chest band. If you plan to cycle in the dark, check that your lights are working before you set off.

It is a good idea to avoid busy main roads and cycle tracks as much as you can. Look at a map of your town and explore some of the local cycle routes. Some towns have good networks of cycle paths and special cycle routes. For details of these, contact the local town council, or write to the Cyclists' Touring Club, Cattell House, 61 Meadow, Geddington, Northants, NN9 5HS. Telephone: 01483-417217.

**For all-round fitness, there is no better activity than swimming.**

Swimming is an excellent activity for advanced swimmers. It is best to make it part of your exercise routine, along with one or more other physical activities. Swimming is ideal for people of all ages - from babies to the over 60s. And because the water supports your weight, swimming is especially good if you are overweight, pregnant or if you suffer from back trouble, arthritis, or have a disability.

Swimming is safe, but don't take off. Now is the time to learn. Most pools run classes for adults and most people find learning to swim quite easy. As many people open early and close late, swimming is something you can do during your way to work, or on your way home. If you don't work, it's often cheaper to go to a local leisure centre, and some pools also offer reduced rates for unwaged people and for senior citizens.

Do you have a baby or toddler who would like to take swimming? Are you pregnant, or over 60? Are you a woman who prefers to swim with only other women in the pool? Many pools have special sessions for people with particular needs. Ask at your local pool for details.