

Physical activity to reduce your cancer risk



Being physically active each day is important for your health and wellbeing. It can also help you maintain a healthy weight, which reduces your risk of certain cancers.

Physical activity is more than just exercise. It's about moving your body and limiting the amount of time you are sitting down each day.

Being inactive can lead to weight gain, which is linked to several cancers including bowel, postmenopausal breast, kidney, pancreatic, liver, endometrial and oesophageal cancer. Research also suggests that sitting for long periods of time each day can increase your risk of developing certain types of cancers.

How active should I be?

To reduce your cancer risk, as well as unhealthy weight gain, adults aged 18-64 should aim for 300 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity or 150 minutes of vigorous intensity physical activity each week.

Physical activity does not need to be continuous. If you are active for at least 10 minutes at a time you can count this towards your daily total. You could walk three times a day for 20 minutes to achieve 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity. Try to move as much as possible throughout the day. If you spend a lot of time sitting, get up and move around regularly.

Moderate intensity physical activity

Moderate intensity physical activity causes a slight increase in heart rate and breathing. Examples of moderate intensity physical activity include brisk walking, mowing the lawn, vacuuming, cycling, yoga, Pilates, or medium paced swimming.

Vigorous intensity physical activity

Vigorous intensity physical activity makes you 'huff and puff' and occurs when you exercise at 70 to 80 per cent of your maximum heart rate. Examples of vigorous intensity physical

activity include: running, aerobics, football, fast cycling, rowing, circuit training, tennis, basketball, netball or soccer.

What do I need to do before I start being physically active?

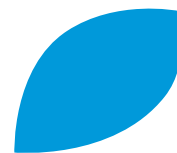
Talk to your doctor or health care professional before starting any exercise, especially if you have not exercised recently, have a chronic or recurring condition or are pregnant, breastfeeding or elderly.

Physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight

Being overweight, with a waistline over 94cm for men and 80cm for women, increases your risk of developing some cancers.

Excess body fat (especially toxic fat around the waist and vital organs) leads to more chemicals and hormones being released into the body, which can lead to inflammation. Inflammation can mean that your cells might not divide correctly and become abnormal, which can keep growing and become a mass or a lump, called a tumour.

Being physically active can help you to maintain a healthy weight. Aim to maintain a healthy body weight with a combination of what you eat and your physical activity.



Guidelines for physical activity

To help Australians understand how much physical activity they need, the Department of Health developed physical activity and exercise guidelines.

For children (5–17 years) the guidelines recommend:

- 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day
- Several hours of light physical activities
- Vigorous activities and weight-bearing/resistance exercises at least 3 days per week
- For greater health benefits, replace sedentary time with extra physical activity
- Break up long periods of sitting down as often as possible
- Limit sedentary recreational screen time to no more than 2 hours per day.

For adults (18–64 years) the guidelines recommend:

- Doing any physical activity is better than none
- Be active on most (preferably all) days of the week
- Each week, accumulate:
 - > 150 to 300 minutes (2 ½ to 5 hours) of moderate intensity physical activity or
 - > 75 to 150 minutes (1 ¼ to 2 ½ hours) of vigorous intensity physical activity, or
 - > an equivalent combination of both moderate and vigorous activities.

- Do muscle strengthening activities at least 2 days a week
- Minimise the amount of time spent sitting down for a long time
- If you must sit for a long time, break it up as often as possible.

For adults over 65 years, the guidelines recommend:

- Being physically active at a moderate intensity for 30 minutes most days of the week
- Do some form of physical activity, no matter your age, weight, health concerns or abilities
- Be active every day in as many ways as possible, doing a range of physical activities that incorporate fitness, strength, balance, and flexibility
- If you have stopped physical activity, or are starting a new physical activity, start at a level that is easily manageable and gradually build up the recommended amount, type and frequency of activity
- If you enjoy a lifetime of vigorous physical activity, you can carry on doing so in a way that suits your capability into later life, provided recommended safety procedures and guidelines are followed.

References

1. World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. Diet, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer: a Global Perspective. Continuous Update Project Expert Report 2018. 2. Baade, P.D., Meng, X., Sinclair, C. and P. Youl. 2012. Estimating the future burden of cancers preventable by better diet and physical activity in Australia. *Med J Aust.* 196(5):337-40. 3. Cancer Council Australia. 2021. National Cancer Prevention Policy: Links between cancer and weight, nutrition and physical activity https://wiki.cancer.org.au/policy/Obesity/Links_between_cancer_and_weight_nutrition_and_physical_activity (accessed November 4, 2021).