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About physical activity

Being active is important to good health and wellbeing at any age. Read about what we mean by physical activity and sedentary behaviour, how active Australians are, and why everyone should be active every day to stay healthy.

What we mean by physical activity

Physical activity is anything that gets your body moving, makes you breathe faster and speeds up your heart rate.

Physical activity comes in many forms, including:

- incidental activity – such as mowing the lawn, cleaning the house or walking to the bus stop
- exercise – structured or planned physical activity, such as going to the gym, a swim or a jog each day
- sport – such as playing rugby, netball or tennis
- muscle strengthening activity – such as weight training or body weight exercises.

You can be physically active at different intensities, including:

- light – where you might not even think about it, such as strolling around the garden, getting dressed or stretching
- moderate – where you are putting in some effort, but it is not strenuous, such as bike riding or going for a brisk walk
- vigorous – where you are out of breath and sweating, such as jogging, star jumping or doing sit ups.

Physical activity can have instant, lasting health benefits. Whatever your age, you should be active most days, preferably every day.

The Australian 24-hour movement guidelines outline:

- how much physical activity we should do
- how much sleep we should get
- the maximum amount of time we should spend sitting or lying down (sedentary behaviour).

The guidelines give some examples of what you can do to incorporate physical activity in your daily life.

What we mean by sedentary behaviour and physical inactivity

Sedentary behaviour is being inactive, either sitting or lying down for long periods (except when sleeping). We spend a lot of time being inactive at school, at work, when travelling or when relaxing.

A lot of sedentary behaviour involves screen time. This includes:

- working or doing homework on a computer
- playing video games
- scrolling social media
- driving a car
- watching movies.

Sedentary behaviour occurs throughout our entire lives. Even babies can be inactive – for example, when strapped in a stroller or car seat. It's important to keep sedentary time to a minimum.

Physical inactivity means not meeting the 24-hour movement guidelines. You can do enough physical activity to meet the guidelines, and still be sedentary if you spend a lot of time sitting or lying down.

Sedentary behaviour and being physically inactive can result in a higher risk of some health conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and depression.

Physical activity in Australia

Too many Australians are not active enough for various reasons, including poor health, injury and lack of time.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Bureau of Statistics research found that in Australia:

- the majority of children aged 2–14 did not meet both the physical activity and screen-based activity components of the guidelines
- 83% of adolescents aged 15–17 did not meet the physical activity component of the guidelines; 80% did not do enough muscle-strengthening activities
- 37% of adults aged 18–64 did not meet the physical activity component of the guidelines; 73% did not do enough muscle-strengthening activities
- 57% of adults aged 65 and over did not meet the physical activity component of the guidelines; 84% did not do enough muscle-strengthening activities
- the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has found that three-quarters of people aged 15 and over with disability do not do enough physical activity.
- the diseases most closely linked to physical inactivity are diabetes, bowel cancer, uterine cancer, dementia, breast cancer, coronary heart disease and stroke.

Why physical activity is important

Being active is important for good health and wellbeing at any age. Everyone should be active most days, preferably every day.

Moving more and sitting less helps:

- improve physical and mental health
- improve quality of life
- increase energy
- reduce the risk of many health conditions
- reduce the risk of overweight and obesity.
- maintain or improve blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

Australia's [24-hour movement guidelines](#) can help you understand how much physical activity you need each day to be healthy.

Read [what we're doing about physical activity](#).

Date last updated: 16 March 2026

Tags:

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