Young People and Physical Activity

Everyone needs to be as active as they can including young people. We feel better when we are active, and it can help our physical health, mental health and even schoolwork. What sort of activity do you need and how often? Find out more here.

# What counts as physical activity?

Physical activity is any activity that gets your body moving, makes you breathe quicker and your heart beat faster. You can be physically active in many ways and at different levels of intensity.

**Low intensity physical activity** gets your heart rate up just a little but doesn't change your breathing pattern. Examples include gentle walking, hanging out the washing and shopping.

**Moderate intensity physical activity** is harder. It requires effort, but you can still speak easily while doing the activity. Examples include brisk walking, swimming, dancing, tennis and riding a bike or scooter.

**Vigorous intensity physical activity** makes you huff and puff! It requires more effort and makes you breathe harder and faster. Examples include running, fast cycling and organised sports such as touch football, hockey or soccer.

**Strength activities** improve bone and muscle strength. They are important too. Examples include lifting and carrying (including books and school bags), climbing stairs, body weight exercises (like rock-climbing), push-ups and sit-ups, and weight, strength and resistance training.

"It makes me feel good .... afterwards my body just feels better." (Year 9 female)

# How much physical activity do we need?

For best health and wellbeing young people need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. This should involve mainly aerobic activities that make the heart beat faster – more is better and every minute of activity counts!

It doesn't have to be 60 minutes at one time. You can make up 60 minutes of activity by doing a few shorter activities during the day.

Young people should also do strength activities at least three days a week.

# The top reasons to be active each day

**It's good for your physical health**

Being active helps your body grow strong and healthy with strong bones and muscles. It also reduces the risk of developing serious but often preventable chronic (long-term and hard to cure) diseases like heart disease, type-2 diabetes, vascular disease (disease affecting the blood vessels), some cancers and some types of arthritis. While these diseases generally show up in adults being physical active when you are young may decrease your chances of these diseases occurring when you are older,. Think of physical active as an investment in your good long term health!

"It just balances everything in your body ... your skin ...  everything." (Year 9 female)

**It helps your mental health**

There is strong evidence being physically active can improve your mental health. This is true for all ages. Physical activity can provide a sense of achievement and independence. It also supports self-esteem and body image, reduces depression and anxiety, and helps you relax and sleep well. Every little bit helps. Even a small amount of physical activity reduces stress and improves mental health.

"Sometimes I just need to go and punch the punching bag and kick it and stuff and it makes me feel heaps better." (Year 8 female)

"You feel better physically and it increases your self-esteem because you know you're doing something good for your body ..." (Year 11 female)

"If I'm angry I can go outside and go for a big walk." (Year 11 female)

**It can help you do well at school**

Getting your heart working out regularly can help people concentrate, work well in class and improve their marks.

"It clears my mind for studying if I go for a run I can come back and be sharper ... better concentration." (Year 11 male)

**It gives you energy**

It might sound like it doesn't make sense but being active and burning energy can give you an energy boost! Yes, that's right. Burning energy can give you energy. Even a 15-minute walk can give you an energy boost – and the more you do it, the bigger the benefits.

*"Like you're dancing ... you're sweaty but you don't care ... you just keep on going and then… you feel so good ... you feel so healthy" (Year 11 male)*

**It's fun!**

Being active doesn’t have to be a chore. Find out what you enjoy and then the fun starts. You can also make new friends. Being part of a group can give you a chance to develop skills like leadership. For many people the friendships and sense of belonging they get from physical activity are as important as the activity itself.

"It's the social part of it that's most important ... having friends in the team is really important so that you have fun and you learn to get on with people." (Year 11 male)

 "It's enjoyment ... like you get this big adrenaline rush." (Year 9 male)

# For more detailed information and examples:

[For children and young people (5 to 17 years) | Australian Government Department of Health](https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/physical-activity-and-exercise/physical-activity-and-exercise-guidelines-for-all-australians/for-children-and-young-people-5-to-17-years)