



get you and your family moving



## Scotland needs to get active – and the time to start is now!

The links between health and levels of activity are clear: become more active and you and your family reduce your risk of health problems, small and large.

Research shows it's never too late to change, or too early to begin. You can reap measurable health benefits whatever age you are – we'll show you exactly what those benefits are and what you need to do to achieve them in this leaflet.

# Active lives: the impact of physical activity on your health

The most common risk factor for coronary heart disease in Scotland is inactivity, and it's a major factor in disability, disease, obesity, and poor mental health. Whilst there are signs that some groups are becoming more active, there is still a lot to be done.

73% of Scottish women and 62% of Scottish men are not active enough to maintain good health (Scottish Health Survey, 1998).

Recent figures show a varied picture of the percentage of pupils reaching the guideline of five 60-minute periods of moderate physical activity per week:

- at 11 years 55.5% of boys and 41.2% of girls achieve this
- at 13 years the figure drops to 46.9% of boys and 28.7% of girls
- at 15 years it falls further to 38.6% of boys and 23.5% of girls.

The connection between good health and physical activity comes from research showing how an active life:

- improves cardiovascular fitness – and that means lungs, heart and the circulation of the blood
- boosts muscle strength and stamina
- makes us more flexible, so we have fewer accidents and less back pain
- helps maintain a healthy weight – the more active you are, the more energy (calories) you 'burn'
- reduces the risk of certain cancers
- reduces the risk of diabetes
- helps prevent the bone disease osteoporosis
- improves mental health.

All that is true for everyone, but for children, there is evidence that physical activity can also contribute to:

- generally better mental health
- improved feelings of self-worth
- better body image
- increased self-esteem.

Health problems associated with a low level of physical activity can start showing in childhood, for example, raised blood pressure, being overweight, and an increased risk of diabetes. However, increasing levels of physical activity early on can help you and your children enjoy the health benefits listed above.



Changing yourself, and your children, so you become active is a challenge – and it's one facing thousands of Scottish families in all parts of the country. But the good news is that national and local government, the health service, schools and other local services are becoming aware of what's needed to support long-lasting change ... a greater number of resources and facilities are in place, to give you a greater choice among a range of activities ... so you can get up and get going!

## Get the facts: how much and how often?

Research into activity levels and health has resulted in some pretty specific information. It means you can aim for a level of activity that will make a real, long-lasting effect on everyone's health.

**This is what everyone needs to know: 'Adults should accumulate (build up) at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week.'**

**'Children should accumulate (build up) at least one hour of moderate activity on most days of the week.'**

**Physical Activity Task Force, 2003.**

'Moderate activity' means something that's the equivalent of brisk walking, but you can be 'moderately active' doing a range of things – as you'll see over the page. More intense activity is fine, too.

The 30 minutes (if you're an adult) or an hour (if you are a child) doesn't have to be done all at once. Two brisk walks to and from school might add up to half an hour, for instance, or more depending on distance. A kick-about in the park might give your child (and you) 10 minutes' activity, or you might both get a further 30 minutes if you go swimming.

What is arguably more important than the **quantity** of physical activity is the **quality** of the experience of that activity. If they have enjoyed an activity, your children will be more likely to want to repeat it. So there are a number of things that you can do that will make it more likely that activity will be kept up:

- base the activity on what your children themselves want to do
- involve them in planning the activity
- try to make the activity enjoyable
- try to develop confidence and wider skills and avoid unnecessary competition.



You are essential to your children's levels of physical activity. Research shows the most active children have parents who are active and support them in their activity. Children say they're motivated to exercise by having fun, and by getting encouragement from their parents.

Of course, your children aren't going to be swayed by the idea that activity makes them healthier as they get older.

But as a parent, you can take the longer-term view, and see how an active life means more fun and enjoyment now.

## Action stations: ideas to try

Being active doesn't have to mean gyms, team sports or expensive classes. You can do things that are free such as walking, jogging or playing actively with your children.

### wheels on fire

Rollerblading, roller-skating, ice-skating, skateboarding can be done at all ages.

*'I hadn't ice-skated since I was ten – and I had to learn all over again. It was great fun. Our children are aged four, seven and nine, and they can all do it. Hire of the boots isn't too costly either.'* Kathy, 35.

**Hint:** the skills used in ice-skating are similar to the ones used in rollerblading. Many sports and leisure centres have regular rollerblading sessions indoors. Make sure you have decent equipment and safety gear!

## walking back to happiness

Brisk walking is best – walk as if you are late for an appointment. You need to:

- feel slightly warmer
- breathe a little faster
- feel your heart beating a little faster.

A short and gentle stroll is pleasant, but to maximise the impact on your health you can aim for more. Try to become more active each day.

*'I let my son walk back home from the childminder each day – that fifteen to twenty minutes is a real contribution to the recommended one hour a day for kids. If other parents realised how easy it was to build up to that one hour they might be more encouraged to do the same with their children.'* Helen, 27.

**Hint:** explore local walks in your area – there could be a number you don't know about. Check out Paths to Health for local walking projects in your area (<http://www.pathsforall.org.uk>; tel. 01259 218855).

## walk safe to school

55% of Scottish children already walk to school – a good start. Reduced car usage around schools makes the area safer for everyone. Time the journey – how far does it contribute to the '30 minutes a day for adults, one hour for children' minimum?

**Hint:** a 'walking bus' means several children can be accompanied to school safely, on foot. Find out more from <http://www.walkingbus.com>.

## in the swim

Most swimming pools have adult classes if parents need to learn or to improve in order to enjoy swimming with their children. Many children learn to swim at school, but it may be quicker to enrol them on an intensive learn-to-swim course in the school holidays. Find out class details by calling locally, or at Scottish Swimming <http://www.scottishswimming.com>.

*'My son and I go swimming together. I think that if he sees me enjoying being active it might influence his attitude to physical activity in a good way. It benefits both of us because not only are we having fun but we're increasing our activity levels.'* Chris, 40.

**Hint:** if your child is taking part in classes, use that time for a swim on your own. Track your speed and aim to improve over time.

## get on down and dance!

Boogie-ing to the latest chart hits is something you can do at home. Make a point of getting off the sofa whenever there's a music programme on TV.

*'My six-year-old daughter and I have worked out lots of routines we've copied from her collection of pop videos. We have a really good laugh doing it.'* Sarah, 25.

**Hint:** don't be shy or embarrassed. Dancing's brilliant for getting your body really working, but you need to do more than bob about ... get moving!



## cycle-logical!

Cycle to work or to the shops, or choose trail or mountain biking to explore the countryside, away from traffic dangers. For information, go to <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/recreation>.

Remember to wear a well-fitted cycle helmet.

Cycling Scotland can give you more ideas, and put you in touch with contacts in your area. Local cycle campaigns can be useful. Go to <http://www.cyclingscotland.org> for links and contact numbers.

Cycling to school can be safe. Find out how to start a Safe Routes group from <http://www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk>.

**Hint:** build up from short journeys to longer ones – and try hills once you start making more progress.



## Break through the barrier: making changes

Lots of families are busy with work, school and just the routine tasks of shopping, cooking, washing, ironing. But making time to care for your family's well-being needs to get a look-in somewhere! It may help to schedule regular times for your activities to get into the habit.



- Getting up earlier makes the most of spring and summer mornings – try a brisk walk or a jog, with adults and children together.
- Early evening is a good time – go outside with a ball for a kick-about. Make sure you do a bit of running!
- Weekends can be the best time for having a go at new activities – plan ahead and find out from the rest of the family what they'd all like to try, and select each family member's idea in turn. That way, you'll find something to suit different ages and interests.
- Fixing a regular time for a walk or a swim with friends makes it more likely you'll keep the date.
- Don't make excuses! It doesn't cost anything – walking, jogging, playing actively with your children, are all free.
- Children shouldn't prevent you from making time for activity ... they can inspire you, and being active with them is a great example for you to set.

## 'It works for us!'

John, 43, Sally, 36 and their family are from Falkirk:

*'When we can, we go out on walks together, some are shorter than others – the one from our front door involves only a small hill so they can all do that one (with the occasional spell on the shoulders). There's lots of variety in the scenery and surroundings, and this keeps the children amused – as well as us.'*

John says their walks and climbs give them time to talk to each other as a family, and that's an important 'plus' as well as the health benefits.

# Moving on: ideas, inspiration and information

For more information phone your local council's information centre or leisure services department to find out what's on offer in your area.

<http://www.cyclingscotland.org>

<http://www.healthyliving.gov.uk> or call the advice line on 0845 2 78 88 78

<http://www.pathsforall.org.uk>

<http://www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk>

<http://www.scottishswimming.com>

<http://www.travelscotland.co.uk>

<http://www.walkingbus.com>

Other leaflets in the *Active Living* series:

- *Help Yourself to Lose Weight*
- *Help Yourself to Reduce the Risk of High Blood Pressure*
- *Keeping Active During and After Pregnancy*

To order, please call 0845 2 78 88 78, or visit [www.healthyliving.gov.uk](http://www.healthyliving.gov.uk) or contact your local health promotion department.

Translations and other formats of these materials are available. Please contact the healthy living advice line on 0845 2 78 88 78.

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