

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR HEALTHY LIVING

Physical activity is important at any stage of life but it becomes more critical for disease prevention as you age. *Jannique van Uffelen (Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Sport, Exercise and Active Living, Victoria University)*, a key speaker at the Productive Ageing Forum, discussed how physical activity and an active lifestyle can play a major role in preventing heart disease, as well as many other diseases, and how making lifestyle changes can help you to enjoy life more.



Jannique van Uffelen suggested that aiming to have fun can help people to ‘move more, sit less’ and improve their health and fitness. She pointed out that it’s never too late to start moving and that looking at your level of physical activity is a good place to begin. Physical activity is any body movement that causes your muscles to contract and increases the amount of energy used. On the other hand, exercise is planned, structured and repetitive, and helps to maintain physical fitness.

Jannique gave examples of physical activity, the different levels of intensity involved and the levels of energy used. For example, vigorous running produces more than three times the energy than sitting on the couch and watching television.

Maintaining muscle strength, muscle endurance, flexibility, balance, agility and coordination can also help with your daily activities. Having strong muscles helps you lift your shopping bags, while having good balance is important for movement and for avoiding falls.

Physical activity and health

The life expectancy of an Australian male in 2008 and 2010 is 79.5 years, and for females is 84, according to a 2012 report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.¹ Jannique said that two-thirds of people who were 65 years old or over rated their health as good or very good. Even so, more than 50% of people who are aged 65–74 years have chronic health problems or are

limited by their physical condition. This increases to 70% of people who are 85 years and over.

A report from the World Health Organization showed that a lack of physical activity increases your risk of dying, ranking fourth after high blood pressure, smoking and high blood sugar.² But Jannique said the good news is that a lot of health problems respond well to physical activity.

Being physically active helps to prevent and manage chronic health conditions (such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes) and will help to maintain and improve your physical function as you become older. Jannique said that leading an active lifestyle may lessen your risk of falls and keep your bones strong as well as helping to keep your brain sharp and prevent and manage depression and anxiety.

Tips for increasing your physical activity

Jannique told the audience that people tend to do less as they become older but doing some physical activity is better than doing nothing at all. Sitting for long periods of time is not great for your health so she suggested people break up long periods of inactivity.

The *National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians* recommend that you are active on most, if not all, days of the week. A total of 150–300 minutes of moderate or 75–150 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012. Australia’s health 2012.

² WHO 2009. Global health risks: mortality and burden of disease.

Recommended physical activity for people aged 18-64

150-300 minutes
per week of moderate
physical activity



75-150 minutes
per week of vigorous
physical activity



Recommended physical activity for people aged 65 and over



30 minutes
per day of moderate
physical activity



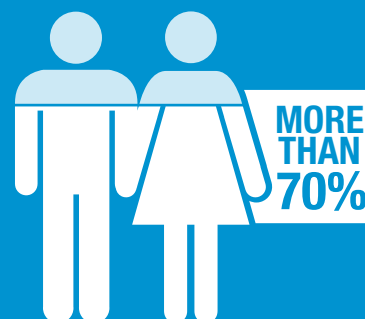
**People 65 or older who
rated their health
as good or very good**



**People aged 65-74 years
with chronic health
problems**



**People aged 80 years
and over with chronic
health problems**



is suggested for adults along with muscle-strengthening exercises at least twice a week. Older people can aim for 30 minutes per day of moderate intensity physical activity that incorporates balance, flexibility, strength and fitness.

Increasing your level of activity can seem daunting, but gradually building up to 30 minutes a day is one way to approach it. If you have specific health conditions that concern you, see a specialist such as an exercise physiologist or your GP who can advise you on the best approach to exercise.

Information on physical activity for older Australians is available at health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-physical-rec-older-guidelines

Information to encourage older Australians to be physically active is available in Choose Health: Be Active (jointly produced by the Department of Health and Ageing and the Department of Veterans' Affairs) and can be downloaded from health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-physical-choose-health

This fact sheet was developed using information provided by Jannique van Uffelen (Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Sport, Exercise and Active Living, Victoria University) in her presentation on Physical Activity for Healthy Living at the Productive Ageing Forum 2014.