Get healthy, get active!

The **NATIONAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES FOR ADULTS** refer to the minimum levels of physical activity required for good health.

1. **Think of movement as an opportunity, not an inconvenience.**
   - We need to change our attitude toward physical activity if we are serious about our long-term health. If we view all movement as an opportunity, rather than an inconvenience, we will be taking a positive step towards better health and preventing illness.
2. **Be active every day in as many ways as you can.**
   - Walk or cycle instead of using a car
   - Take the stairs instead of the lift
   - Work in the garden
   - Walk or play with pets
3. **Put together at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days.**
   - Moderate intensity activity will cause a slight, but noticeable, increase in your breathing and heart rate. Examples include: brisk walking, mowing the lawn, digging in the garden, medium-paced swimming or cycling.
   - You can accumulate 30 minutes or more throughout the day by combining a few shorter sessions of 10–15 minutes each.
4. **If you can, also enjoy some regular, vigorous activity for extra health and fitness.**
   - Vigorous activity makes you "huff and puff". Examples include: football, netball, basketball, gym workouts (aerobics, circuit training, boxing), jogging, fast cycling.
   - For best results, this activity should be carried out for a minimum of 30 minutes, three to four days a week.
   - Prior to carrying out vigorous activity, medical advice is recommended for those who have been previously inactive, who have heart disease, have close relatives with heart disease or who have other major health problems.
   - Warm-up, cool-down, stretching and a gradual build-up from an inactive level are also recommended with vigorous activity.

Regular physical activity can:

- Help prevent heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure
- Reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and some cancers
- Help build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints reducing the risk of injury
- Promote psychological wellbeing

Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing (1999). National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

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What are the benefits of exercise for PLHIV?

Exercise can have important health benefits for PLHIV.

Loss of muscle mass and strength is often seen in PLHIV who are not taking HAART (Highly Active Anti-retroviral Therapy); however exercise can help to prevent muscle loss and can assist with rebuilding strength.

PLHIV who are taking HAART (in particular protease inhibitors) may have increased blood lipids (cholesterol and triglycerides) and increased blood glucose levels.

Both of these factors can increase the risk of developing impaired glucose tolerance, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Completing 'vigorous' aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes three times a week assists in lowering blood lipids and blood glucose levels.

Resistance training (lifting weights) has been shown to increase HDL (good) cholesterol, decrease LDL (bad) cholesterol and decrease triglyceride levels.

It can also promote and maintain muscle, while reducing body fat and increasing muscle strength.

This can be beneficial for people with lipodystrophy, by reducing fat accumulation and building muscle in areas where fat has been lost.

Planning an exercise program

Before commencing an exercise program, you should gain medical consent from your doctor.

It is a good idea to have a personal trainer (available at most gyms) to design an individual training program for you – the program will vary depending on whether you want to gain weight or lose weight.

Stretching should be completed at the start and end of each exercise session to warm-up and cool-down your muscles. Warm-up exercises (such as jogging, slow cycling) should last no longer than 8-10 minutes and should not tire you out; this will decrease the risk of muscle damage during strenuous exercise and will increase blood flow to the heart.

Food and fluid requirements for exercise

It is essential for your body to be hydrated prior to exercise – dehydration can increase your heart rate, increase body temperature and decrease exercise capacity.

Consuming a large meal prior to exercise is not recommended, as blood flow is redirected towards the stomach and intestines for digestion of food. You may also suffer indigestion and reflux if completing strenuous exercise within 60 minutes of a large meal.

It is appropriate to have a light snack containing carbohydrates (such as toast or fruit) or energy drink (sports drink, cordial, juice) 30 minutes prior to exercise, to provide your body with energy and to normalise blood glucose levels. Light snacks containing fat should be avoided, as fat takes longer to be digested and may redirect blood away from the muscles.

Having a meal high in carbohydrates and protein after each exercise session is beneficial to promote muscle repair and growth (Wilmore and Costill, 1999).

References:

1. *This information has been reproduced with permission from NAM, publishers of aidsmap.com*
2. *Wilmore J.H and Costill D.L (1999). Physiology of Sport and Exercise, 2nd Edition. Human Kinetics, USA.*