

Researchers lead new national guidance on how to stay fit and healthy

September 9 2019



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Guidance on how the UK population can stay fit and healthy has been updated thanks to a major review led by the University of Bristol.

The [physical activity guidelines issued today by the four Chief Medical Officers](#) (CMOs) of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, offer advice to all age groups and—for the first time—pregnant women, new mums and disabled adults.

Drawing on the most up-to-date scientific evidence for the benefits of [physical activity](#), the revised guidelines emphasise the importance of building strength and balance for adults, as well as focusing on cardiovascular exercise.

Led by Dr. Charlie Foster, from the Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences at the University of Bristol, the review of the 2011 guidance involved over 500 academics, health professionals and members of the public from around the country.

There is strong evidence that physical activity protects against a range of chronic conditions. Meeting the guidelines can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes by 40 percent, coronary heart disease by 35 percent and depression by 30 percent.

The report, which has informed the new guidelines and infographics, has a separate chapter for each age group and advises on the type and amount of physical activity people should undertake to improve their health.

Under the new guidelines, adults are advised to undertake strength-based exercise at least two days a week—which can help delay the natural decline in muscle mass and bone density that starts from around 50. It is believed that this is a central reason why older people lose their ability to carry out daily tasks.

To avoid falls—the number one reason older people are taken to A&E—the guidelines suggest daily activities ranging from brisk

walking, carrying heavy shopping or climbing stairs, swimming and gardening.

The guidelines also include world-first recommendations for new mothers, advising that a moderate amount of exercise is proven to help them regain strength, ease back pain and reduce the risk of gestational diabetes.

Dr. Foster, who received an OBE in the Queen's New Year Honours list in recognition of his work to promote physical activity, said: "Exercise is one of the cheapest and most effective forms of medicine, with far-reaching benefits for both our health and happiness. It is vital for all [age groups](#) and abilities, hence we've introduced advice for pregnant women, new mums and disabled adults.

"The addition of strength-based exercise at least two days a week for adults will help delay the natural decline in [muscle mass](#) and bone density that starts from around 50. And into older age, we recommend regular strength, flexibility and balance activities to maintain physical function, ultimately helping to stave off injury and illness.

"The [new guidelines](#) and accompanying infographics are based on substantial research and have been developed to make it easier for health professionals and others to promote the benefits of physical activity to all."

New advice is also available to encourage good development in babies and children, with the UK Chief Medical Officers recommending lots of "tummy time."

As much active play as possible in children under five is encouraged, and older children are recommended to be active for an average of 60 minutes a day, across the week.

The report also highlights the risks of inactivity and sedentary behavior for health. There have been notable developments in the evidence base for the impact this has on people's health, with research suggesting sitting time is associated with heart disease, cancer risk and obesity.

Chief Medical Officer for England, Professor Dame Sally Davies said: "Physical activity is an under-appreciated asset in our clinical arsenal. It is cheap and brings a long list of [health](#) benefits.

"As we age, our muscles weaken and we can become stiff, leading to falls and difficulty performing everyday activities. Physical activity can prevent fragility and support mobility in old age. By keeping active, both throughout the day and also through hobbies, we can slow muscle and bone decline, ultimately keeping us independent for longer."

Future work will focus on the communication of the guidelines and monitoring their impact.

[UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines are available on the Department of Health's website](#). A [handy summary](#) is available from the BBC website.

More information: The physical activity guidelines issued today: [assets.publishing.service.gov. ... ivity-guidelines.pdf](#)

Provided by University of Bristol

Citation: Researchers lead new national guidance on how to stay fit and healthy (2019, September 9) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-09-national-guidance-healthy.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.