

Press release

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Top doctors release new guidance on how to stay fit and healthy

- New guidelines look to building strength and balance to prevent falls and immobility in old age
- For the first time, new advice is tailored for pregnant women, new mums and disabled adults
- Advice to the public is “some is good, more is better”

The UK’s top doctors are recommending over-65s take up dancing, bowls or even activities like tai chi to help stave off injury and illness in old age.

New guidance issued today emphasises the importance of building strength and balance for adults, as well as focusing on cardiovascular exercise. Falls are the number one reason older people are taken to A&E and could be avoided through daily activities ranging from brisk walking, carrying heavy shopping or climbing stairs, swimming and gardening.

The guidance advises on safe levels of activity for pregnant women or new mums, and the many benefits that this can bring, as long as they listen to their body and speak to their health professional.

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%, coronary heart disease by 35% and depression by 30%.

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.”

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.

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.

The new guidelines are an update to those released in 2011, but the overall message remains the same: any activity is better than none, and more is better still.

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. To support this, the Government will work with nurseries to find fun opportunities for young children to exercise during the day through the new Daily Toddle initiative.

ENDS

ANNEX

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland said:

“The new guidance sets out clearly the benefits of being active and recommendations on how to achieve that at all stages of life. Exercising regularly has not only proven benefits for physical health but the positive impact on mental health should not be underestimated. I am therefore delighted to launch this guidance today.”

Holly Holder, Evidence Manager, Centre for Ageing Better said:

“It’s great to see these guidelines focusing on the importance of exercises which improve muscle strength and support good balance, which we know can have a huge impact on keeping us healthier for longer and reducing the risk of falls in later life.

“Many of us don’t realise the huge difference this kind of activity can make to our wellbeing, especially as we age. Improving awareness is crucial to preventing ill-health in later life and reducing the demand on our social care system.

“At the moment, very few people meet the recommended target for muscle strengthening and balance exercises. Much more needs to be done to make strength and balance programmes available and accessible to people across the country, including more funding and a joined-up approach in local areas.”

Tim Hollingsworth, Sport England’s CEO said:

“It’s great to see the new CMO guidelines putting the building of strength and balance on a similar footing to cardiovascular exercise as important for our health and wellbeing.

“The beauty of it is there are many ways to build strength and balance, whether it’s at home, at the gym or through sport. Resistance training, circuit training, racket sports and yoga are all great for example for improving muscle function, bone health and balance.

“For someone short on time, hearing that every minute of activity we do counts is also going to be welcome and positive news. Those who do the least have the most to gain and it’s never too late to start gaining the health benefits. There are so many ways to get active, what’s important is to find a way that works for you.”

ukactive CEO Huw Edwards said:

“These simple guidelines may be the first step towards not only a more active nation, but also a stronger one.

“With National Fitness Day and European Week of Sport coming soon it would be great to see more people engaging in simple effective strengthening activities - from carrying the shopping bags to trying some gentle weights.

“In previous iterations of the CMO’s guidelines the focus has been on the importance of moderate to vigorous aerobic physical activity, with the importance of muscle strength and activities to promote it playing second fiddle.

“The latest guidelines are more reflective of the evidence and the importance of activities such as resistance training for all adults, reflecting their equal positioning alongside the aerobic activity recommendations.

“ukactive is proud to support these guidelines and for our Research Institute to feed into them.”

Dr Max Davie, Officer for Health Improvement for the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) said:

“Physical activity has many benefits - it’s good for the heart and mind – and when coupled with a healthy diet, can enhance a child’s health and wellbeing dramatically. So these updates to the Chief Medical Officer’s physical activity guidelines are extremely welcome.

“We know that healthy children are much more likely to grow into healthy adults. But key to longevity and success, is embedding healthy habits into life early and making them part of a routine.

“With busy schedules and modern day life getting in the way, we know families face a huge challenge at times to include physical activity in their day. However, as children’s doctors who see the result of poor fitness and diet regularly, we ask them to rise to the challenge and where possible, try and build exercise into daily routines – walking or cycling to school for example. We know that by doing so, it can have major mental and physical health benefits for their growing child both now and in the future.”

Barry Horne, Chief Executive for Activity Alliance, said:

“We welcome the new guidelines, especially with the new advice tailored by and for disabled people. The stark reality is that disabled people are twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people. Our insight shows that expecting every adult to do the same allotted amount of time or intensity is unrealistic. Disabled people and people with long-term health conditions often tell us about the mix of ways they can get active. This includes small bouts of exercise, where people can have fun together.

“Working alongside healthcare professionals, Activity Alliance can use these new guidelines to promote better inclusion within activity. This ensures better physical and mental health outcomes for everyone.”