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## EXERCISE AND ACTIVITY LEAFLET

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### What it is / who it affects

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Exercise means any movement that makes your body work harder than when you are resting. This includes walking, cycling, gardening, swimming, dancing, playing with children, and sports.

Everyone benefits, whatever your age, fitness, weight, or health conditions. Any movement is better than none, and more is better still.

### Why being active matters

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Being active reduces your risk of:

- Heart disease and stroke
- Type 2 diabetes
- Some cancers
- Depression and anxiety
- Falls, frailty, and loss of independence as you get older

It can also improve:

- Sleep, energy, mood, and confidence
- Joint and back stiffness
- Blood pressure and cholesterol



### Symptoms and red flags

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It is normal to feel a bit puffed during exercise, and mild muscle ache for 24 to 48 hours after new activity.

Speak to a clinician before starting a new exercise plan if you have:

- Chest pain, palpitations, or dizziness with activity
- Severe breathlessness not explained by fitness level
- New swelling in a joint, severe pain, or a recent injury
- A long-term condition and you are worried about what is safe for you

## Diagnosis and tests

There is no single test for inactivity. At reviews (for example blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, or heart disease) we may ask about activity levels and help you choose safe, realistic next steps.

## Treatment and self-help

### **How much activity should I aim for?**

*Adults (most people):*

- Aim for 150 minutes of moderate activity per week (for example brisk walking or cycling), OR 75 minutes of vigorous activity (for example running), OR a mix of both
- Do strengthening activities on at least 2 days per week (legs, hips, back, tummy, chest, shoulders, arms)
- Try to be active daily
- Reduce sitting time and break up long periods of sitting with light movement



If you are busy: doing your weekly activity across 1 to 2 days can still be beneficial. Warm up and build up gradually to reduce injury risk.

### **How hard should it feel? (The Talk Test)**

This helps you judge intensity without gadgets:

- Moderate intensity: you are warmer and breathing harder, but you can still talk in sentences
- Vigorous intensity: you are breathing hard and fast and can only say a few words before needing breath

### **Reassurance: is exercise safe if I have a health condition?**

For most people, physical activity is safe if you:

- Start gently and build up
- Choose something you can stick with
- Use the Talk Test to stay in the right zone for you

If you have a heart condition, severe lung disease, or symptoms such as chest pain or dizziness with activity, get advice first.

### **Best "starter" options (simple, low injury risk)**

If you are starting from low levels of activity, these are usually the easiest wins:

- Brisk walking (including short "Active 10" style walks)
- Cycling on the flat or using an exercise bike
- Swimming or gentle aqua-aerobics

- Chair-based exercise or "sit to stand" practice
- Gardening, vacuuming, carrying shopping (counts as strength work)

### **Easy ways to add movement without "doing exercise"**

Pick 2 or 3 to try this week:

- Walk for 5 to 10 minutes after a meal
- Park further away, or get off the bus one stop early
- Take stairs for 1 to 2 flights when you can
- Set a timer to stand up and move for 1 to 2 minutes every hour
- Turn calls into walking calls
- Put music on and dance while cooking or tidying
- Make weekends your "movement anchor" (longer walk, cycle, swim)



### **Building strength (2 days a week)**

Strength protects joints, improves balance, and helps prevent frailty.

Good options:

- Sit-to-stand from a chair (repeat 8 to 12 times, rest, repeat)
- Wall press-ups or kitchen-counter press-ups
- Resistance band exercises
- Carrying shopping, gardening, or light weights

### **Myth-busting**

Myth-busting about exercise	
Myths	Facts
You need a gym membership	You can be active anywhere
Exercise is unsafe with a health condition	Start gently and build up gradually
Short sessions don't help	They add up over the day

### **Complications and prognosis**

Benefits start quickly. Many people notice better mood and sleep within weeks. Long-term benefits include lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, and loss of mobility with age.

## Follow-up and monitoring

- Track progress with a diary, step counter, or an app (some people find this motivating)
- If pain, breathlessness, or fatigue are limiting, we can help you choose the right pace and type of activity
- Your GP may refer you to local support such as an exercise referral scheme where appropriate.

## Further reading and resources

- **NHS: Physical activity guidelines (adults 19 to 64).**  
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-for-adults-aged-19-to-64/>
- **NHS: Physical activity guidelines (older adults)**  
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-older-adults/>
- **NHS Better Health: Get active (includes NHS Active 10 and Couch to 5K)**  
<https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/get-active/>
- **NHS Couch to 5K**  
<https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/get-active/get-running-with-couch-to-5k/>
- **UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines (PDF)**  
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d839543ed915d52428dc134/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf>
- **Moving Medicine: Patient information finder**  
<https://movingmedicine.ac.uk/consultation-guides/patient-information-finder/>
- **Parkrun (walking, jogging, running, volunteering)**  
<https://www.parkrun.org.uk/>

## If you have further questions:

- **Visit:** [www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/contact-us](http://www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/contact-us) and fill out our triage form
- **Call us:** 01285 653198 or 01285 652122
- **Call NHS 111** if you need urgent medical advice (24/7)
- **Call 999** in an emergency

## When to Seek Help



### Green – Carry on

Mild muscle ache that settles with rest  
Shortness of breath only during exercise



### Amber – Contact GP or NHS 111

Breathlessness that limits daily activities  
New joint pain or swelling



### Red – Call 999

Chest pain or pressure during exercise  
Severe shortness of breath at rest

## CHG simple and realistic 2-week starter exercise plan

This plan is designed to help you get started safely, even if you have not been active for a while. You can repeat or adjust it to suit you.

### Week 1: Get moving most days

*Aim: build the habit, not fitness.*

- Walk for 5 to 10 minutes on at least 5 days
- Use the Talk Test: you should be able to talk in sentences
- On 2 days, add sit-to-stand from a chair (8 to 10 times, once or twice)

*Helpful tips:*

- Choose the same time each day (after breakfast or dinner works well)
- If you miss a day, just restart the next day
- Mild muscle ache is normal and should settle within 1 to 2 days

### Week 2: Build a little more

*Aim: gently increase time and confidence.*

- Walk for 10 to 15 minutes on 5 days
- On 1 or 2 days, walk a little faster for short bursts
- On 2 days, repeat sit-to-stand, or try wall press-ups

*Helpful tips:*

- Split activity into short chunks if needed
- Keep one day easier if you feel tired
- Feeling warmer and slightly out of breath is expected

### After 2 weeks: what next?

- Gradually increase walking time towards 20 to 30 minutes
- Add variety: cycling, swimming, gardening, or classes
- Aim for 2 strength days each week
- Remember: consistency matters more than intensity

### When to pause or get advice

- Pain that does not settle after rest
- Dizziness, chest pain, or severe breathlessness
- Worsening symptoms from an existing health condition

If this happens, reduce the intensity or contact the practice or NHS 111.

### Key message:

***Small, regular steps work. You do not need to be perfect — just keep going.***

