

## 8 let's get physical

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MOST of us spend a large chunk of our day sitting, lying down or sleeping.

The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2011 elucidated that one out of three Malaysian adults aren't physically active. So, it's a laid back, easygoing life for many people in this country.

The survey went on to report that women are more inactive than men, a statistical pattern shared by adult urbanites with their rural counterparts.

This prolonged sedentary behaviour may promote impairment of glucose control in the body, which could increase the risk of acquiring type 2 diabetes.

When healthy individuals reduced their physical activity by about half for three days, the spikes in blood sugar that occurred after a meal doubled.

Keep "sedentary-ism" to a minimum. If you're the kind of person that likes to watch TV, surf the Net, play video games or just enjoy prolonged quiet moments of lying down and doing nothing, limit it to about two hours or less per day.

### Physical activity is key

Regular physical activity can help counter the risk factors that lead to type 2 diabetes, and possibly prevent it altogether.

Physical activity helps the body utilise glucose more efficiently, thereby controlling levels in the blood.

For people with pre-diabetes, about 20-30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity physical activity coupled with a weight loss of 5-7% (via a healthy diet) reduced the risk of progression to diabetes by 58%.

Of course, most of us would argue that work, chores and other tasks keep us so busy and occupied throughout the day that we hardly get any free time for ourselves, much less spend 20 minutes of it on exercise. But excuses don't help prevent diabetes, actions do!

Starting off is the most difficult, and possibly the largest obstacle in trying to be physically active. So, start slow, but keep it going, and don't overdo it, otherwise, you'll quickly lose motivation and interest.

As you get more used to your regime, work your way towards achieving a daily 30-60 minute session while increasing the intensity of your workouts or physical activity as you progress.

If you can't commit that much in one go, spread the time out by doing 10 minutes at different intervals throughout the day instead.

### Be active every day

Whether you're a student, a working mum or a retiree, staying active can be easy, and it's never too early or too late to start.

Consider these simple and practical tips to keep you active throughout the day:

**Office workers:** Wake up 10 minutes earlier than your usual time and do some light stretching exercises. Walk up the stairs instead of taking the lift if your office is within the first five floors.

If you have to take the lift, stop five floors below and walk the rest of the way up.

While working in the office, take five to 10 minute breaks to walk briskly in the office.

Take a walk after lunch/dinner. Do rope-skipping or stationary cycling while watching television (if you don't have the equipment, you can do simple exercise, such as swinging your arms while walking on the spot).

During weekends, wash your own car. If you have young children, go for family outings in the park and play.

Walk briskly for at least 30 minutes, four to five times a week.

**Housewives:** Spend less time sitting down. For example, avoid sitting down in front of the television for a long stretch.

# Run, baby, run

Running away from your problems is never a good idea, unless that problem is diabetes. The key word here is to 'run', literally!



Stay active to keep diabetes at arm's length. – Filepic

Do rope-skipping or stationary cycling 15 to 20 minutes every day, at any time of the day.

Be more vigorous in doing your household work, for example, vacuuming, mopping, scrubbing or cleaning the windows.

Walk to the market or shops if they're within walking distance.

Walk briskly for at least 30 minutes, four to five times a week.

**Elderly:** Do some light stretching exercises. Walk briskly for at least 30 minutes, four to five times a week.

You can also do stationary cycling while watching television.

Avoid sitting too long in front of the television, and go for walks after dinner.

### Moderate-intensity physical activities

Moderate-intensity type physical activities get you moving fast enough or strenuously enough to increase your heart rate and break a sweat, but still allows you to talk and utter full sentences.

This level of intensity can help you burn off three to six times more energy per minute compared to sitting down and doing nothing.

Examples of moderate-intensity physical activity include:

- Brisk walking
- Playing sports leisurely (eg badminton, basketball, football)
- Dancing
- Aerobic exercise
- Swimming

Just 30 minutes per day of moderate-intensity physical activity is all you need to burn those extra calories and maintain a healthy body weight.

It also simultaneously reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes, improves blood pressure and cholesterol levels, enhances stamina, and also, helps work your muscles.

### Vigorous-intensity exercises

Once in a while, try a vigorous workout. You can carry out the same activities from a moderate workout, but with an increased level of effort.

For example, consider jogging or running instead of speed-walking, and diversify your route to also include hills, stairs and elevated terrains to provide more resistance.

### Encourage children to be active

Children today also tend to be more sedentary. The lure of electronic games, gadgets and the television is hard to resist.

Nevertheless, it's still not an excuse. Parents should try to be role models for active lifestyles and provide children with opportunities for increased physical activity. So kids should get out there and move more.

There's so much to do, but the key is to have FUN. Here are a few things you can do to encourage your children to be more active:

- Encourage free play or unstructured physical activity among young children, such as walking or running.
- Play actively during school recess or take part in school sports.
- If possible, walk or cycle to school.
- Help parents in daily household chores, such as sweeping, washing own school shoes and mopping the floor.
- Encourage primary school-aged children and adolescents to do some physical activity, such as push-ups, sit-ups, working with resistance bands, jumping rope, basketball or hopscotch.
- Encourage children and adolescents to engage in vigorous-intensity activities that are suitable for their age, such as running and chasing, football, basketball, swim-

ming, riding a bicycle, jumping rope, martial arts or vigorous dancing.

● Limit television watching, video games and leisure surfing of the Internet to less than two hours per days.

● If children are into electronic games, encourage them to play active video games rather than sedentary ones.

Healthy, physically-active kids are also more likely to be academically motivated and alert, and physical competence builds self-esteem at every age.

Next to not smoking, and eating healthily, getting regular physical activity is arguably the best thing you can do to reduce the risk of diabetes and increase your overall well-being.

Remember that any amount of physical activity is better than none, and the sooner you start, the higher your chance of preventing diabetes. So, run, baby, run!

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