



Cumbria, Northumberland,
Tyne and Wear
NHS Foundation Trust



The benefits of physical activity
for mental and physical health

Information leaflet



Caring | Discovering | Growing | **Together**

Movement is medicine

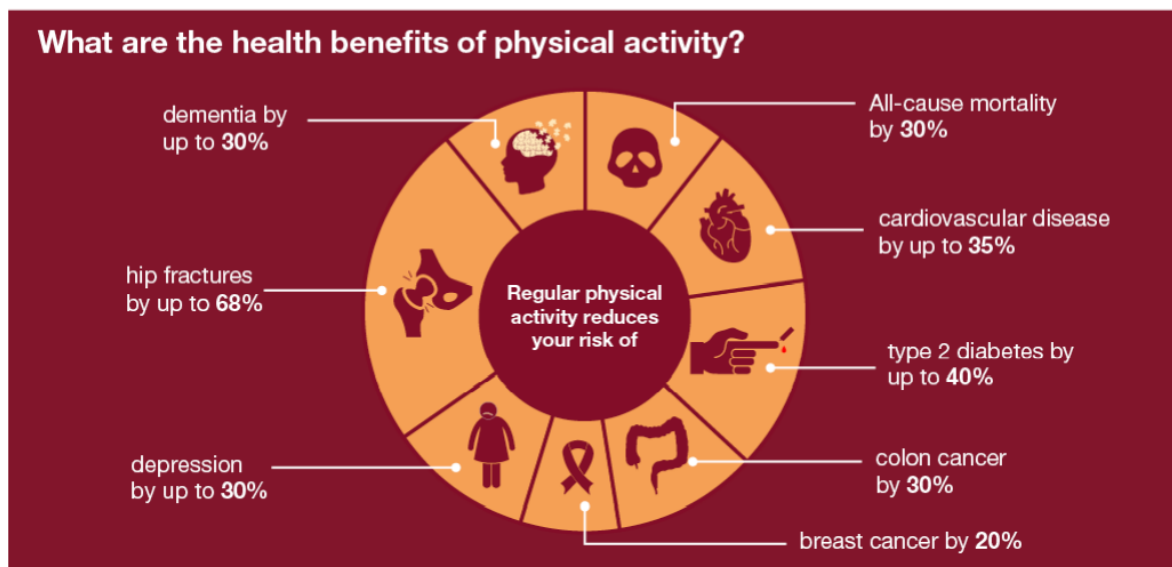
Inactivity directly impacts on your health and contributes to 1 in 6 deaths across the UK; which is on par with smoking.

Compared to the general population, individuals with serious mental illness:

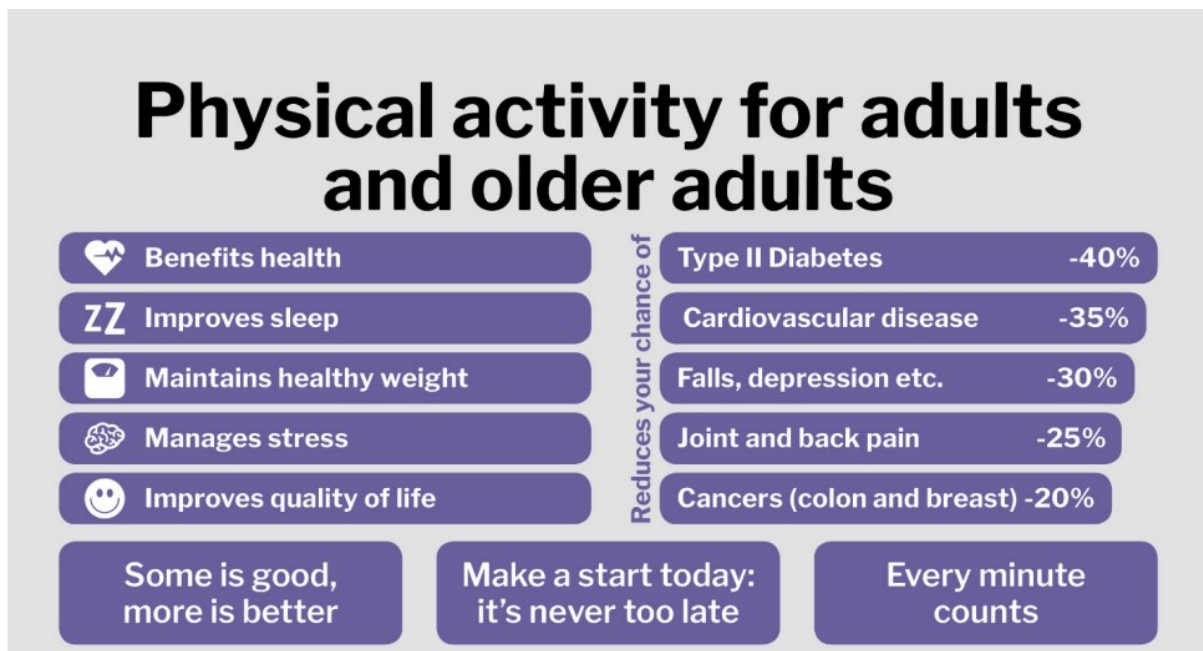
- Face a **shorter life expectancy** by an average of 15-20 years.
- Are **three times more likely to smoke**.
- Are at double the risk of **obesity and diabetes** and three times the risk of **hypertension and metabolic syndrome**.

This highlights the importance of looking after your physical health and wellbeing, by maintaining an active lifestyle and eating a healthy well balanced diet.

If physical activity was a medication it would be classed as a '**wonder drug**'. Physical activity can help manage or prevent over 20 chronic conditions or diseases.



Here are a few more benefits to increasing your activity levels:



Exercise can also help improve self-esteem, improve mood and motivation, improve concentration and provide a positive focus. It reduces tension, anger and agitation.

Persuading inactive people to become more active could prevent **1 in 10 cases of stroke and heart disease** in the UK and **1 in 6 deaths from any cause**.

Given the overwhelming evidence, it seems obvious that we should all be physically active. It is essential if you want to live a healthy and fulfilling life into old age.

Exercise Recommendations

Ask yourself two questions

- On average how many days a week do you engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity?
- On those days, on average, how many minutes do you engage in physical activity at this level?

If the answer is less than 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise per week you could benefit from increasing your activity levels.

Be active

at least **150** minutes moderate intensity per week
increased breathing
able to talk

OR

at least **75** minutes vigorous intensity per week
breathing fast
difficulty talking

or a combination of both

Build strength
to keep muscles, bones and joints strong

on at least **2** days a week

Gym, Yoga, Carry heavy bags, Run, Stairs, Sport, Bows, Tai Chi, Dance

Minimise sedentary time
Break up periods of inactivity

Improve balance
For older adults, to reduce the chance of frailty and falls
2 days a week

UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines 2019

For currently inactive individuals, evidence shows the following health benefits could be achieved from **10 minutes of brisk walking per day** for 7 days:

- Increased physical fitness
- Greater ease of performance of everyday physical activities
- Improved mood
- Improved quality of life
- Increased body leanness and healthier weight
- 15% reduction in risk of early death

Depression and mental health issues are increasing in all age groups. People who are inactive have three times the rate of moderate to severe depression of active people. Being active is central to our mental health and wellbeing.

Top tips to get started

As with any lifestyle change we would always recommend you discuss any plans with your GP or health professional before starting, ensuring that the exercise/activity is appropriate and safe for you.

- Get family or friends involved- practical and emotional support from friends, family or experts really does help improve motivation levels.
- Make time for exercise- plan activities into your daily routine, you may have to re-arrange commitments or choose activities that fit into your routine.
- Start small and build up- something is better than nothing, even 10 minutes at a time will provide benefits and remember it's never too late to get started.
- Set goals- goal setting is really important, they will help you monitor your progress and motivate you. When setting goals make sure they are SMART;

Specific = What exactly do you want to achieve?

Measurable = How will you know if you meet your goal?

Achievable = What steps are you going to take to reach your goal?

Relevant = Why is it important to you?

Timely = When do you want to complete your goal?

Fact or Fiction?

<p>Exercise can help reduce symptoms of and lower risk of developing depression</p>	<p>FACT: Exercise increases the release of feel good chemicals (endorphins), increases confidence, self-esteem, motivation and energy levels. It provides a positive focus, a distraction from your worries, a challenge and can provide opportunities to increase your social interaction and networks. All of these are shown to reduce symptoms of depression.</p>
<p>I can eat what I want because I'm exercising.</p>	<p>FICTION: There's some truth in the saying "you can't outrun a bad diet". Regular exercise will burn calories but does not get rid of the damage that regularly eating foods high in salt and saturated fat can do to your health. If you are trying to lose weight then it's important to make changes to both your diet and level of physical activity. It's fine to have a treat now and then, but try to eat a balanced diet, including lots of vegetables and wholegrains. This will help to give you the nutrients you need to maintain your exercise routine.</p>
<p>"I'm too old to exercise"</p>	<p>FICTION: Actually, not moving is much riskier and can speed up the aging process. Inactive people are twice as likely to develop heart disease and they also have more doctor visits and take more medications. If you haven't exercised in a long time, begin slowly with low-impact aerobic activity that raises your heart rate, such as swimming or walking. Exercise doesn't have to mean taking up a new sport. But if there's an activity that you used to enjoy when you were younger (say, tennis</p>

	<p>or football), look for a way to get back to it. E.g. Walking football, walking netball etc.</p>
<p>Exercise can help reduce stress and anxiety levels</p>	<p>FACT: Exercise produces a relaxation response that serves as a positive distraction from stress and anxiety.</p>
<p>Smoking helps manage my mental health condition</p>	<p>FICTION: Many people used to believe that smoking was a way for those with Mental Health problems to self-medicate or manage their condition. We now know that smoking actually increases stress levels and that stopping smoking can result in lower levels of self-reported stress and higher mood scores.</p>
<p>Exercise reduces your risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, osteoarthritis and dementia</p>	<p>FACT: Building regular physical activity into daily routines and having a healthy lifestyle can help to prevent/reduce weight gain and reduce the risk of developing disease.</p> <p>Research suggests that between 40-80% of patients taking antipsychotic medication experience weight gain and that cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes and respiratory disease is more common in patients with mental health illness in the general population.</p> <p>Up to 75% of deaths in mental health patients are from natural causes, mostly cardiovascular disease, therefore life expectancy is 20% lower than in the general population.</p>

How exercise has benefited CNTW service users



"I wanted something to do and tried Exercise Therapy, My mind and my body are healthy thanks to the team"

"Exercise, Fresh air, chatting and talking gets my mind off things."

"It makes me feel better. A sense of achievement."

"I'd never thought about using the gym. It gave me confidence, I look forward to it now."



"Gym and Exercise keeps me happy and elevates my mood"



"Staff are competent, very helpful with regards to my stroke recovery. Great contact with the ward during COVID"

Help is at hand

Visit the Trusts “A Weight off your mind” website www.cntw.nhs/awoym for useful information on healthy diet and nutrition and for help to find a range of activities that are available in your area. The NHS website also have lots of useful information on Fitness and training, nutrition, healthy eating and weight loss. This includes podcasts and training guides.



Strength and flex



Losing weight - Getting started

Developed in association with [The British Dietetic Association](http://www.bda.uk.com)

NHS 12week weight-loss programme

Public Health England have a number of campaigns available to support you in increasing your activity levels, with many available as phone apps to support you along the way.



References

- National Statistic and NHS digital 2017- Statistics on obesity, physical activity and diet
- Public Health England 19 July 2016- Health matters; Everybody active, everyday: An evidence-based approach to physical activity https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/374914/Framework_13.pdf
- Public Health England August 2017- 10 minutes brisk walking each day in mind-life for health benefits and towards achieving physical activity recommendations: Evidence-based summary.

Websites listed above were accessed in August 2021 and were correct at that time.



Further information about the content, reference sources or production of this leaflet can be obtained from the Patient Information Centre. If you would like to tell us what you think about this leaflet please get in touch.

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Published by the Patient Information Centre
2021 Copyright Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS
Foundation Trust

Ref, PIC/716/0921 September 2021 V4

www.ntw.nhs.uk Tel: 0191 246 7288

Review date 2024



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