

Physical activity

What is physical activity?

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by muscles that requires energy expenditure. It involves movement during formal exercise, leisure time and for transport to get to and from places.

Why is physical activity important for older adults?

- Active older adults have lower rates of mortality, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. They also have better fitness, body composition and cardiovascular health.
- Exercise can reduce falls by up to 23 per cent, lowering the risk of fall-related injuries.
- Balance and strength exercises at least 3 times a week can help reduce falls and fall-related injuries in older adults.
- Higher physical activity levels can improve bone health, which can help prevent osteoporosis and enhance bone density.
- Regular physical activity reduces the risk of age-related physical function decline in older adults.
- Daily movement recommendations are included in the [Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines](#).

Benefits of physical activity

Regular physical activity reduces older adults' risk of:

- hip fractures by up to 68 per cent
- type 2 diabetes by up to 40 per cent
- dementia by 30 per cent
- cardiovascular diseases by up to 35 per cent
- breast cancer by 20 per cent
- colon cancer by 30 per cent
- depression by up to 30 per cent
- all cause mortality by 30 per cent.



Best practice tips

- **Consult a professional:** Encourage consumers to consult a health professional before commencing exercise.
- **Stay informed:** Stay updated on the latest research and recommendations for physical activity for older adults.
- **Education and behaviour change:** Education and promoting long-term change can lead to increased physical activity for consumers (e.g., goal setting, self-monitoring and providing feedback).

Physical activity in hospital

- Daily mobilisation to help prevent deconditioning and falls.
- Maintain clear pathways for consumers to move.
- Encourage consumers to mobilise to and from the bathroom.
- Encourage consumers to transfer and sit out for meals.
- Encourage consumers to walk around the facility, try chair exercises or do some gentle stretching.
- Where relevant, consider referring the consumer to an inpatient physiotherapist for a mobility review, gait aid (if required) and an individualised exercise program.
- Educate consumers on the importance of 'moving' and relate this to their goals.
- **To prepare for discharge:** recommend consumers access the Injury Matters Stay On Your Feet® WA community focused resources, and if available, consider a referral to an outpatient physiotherapist, exercise physiologist or personal trainer/local gym for an individualised exercise program.

More information

- Stay On Your Feet: www.injurymatters.org.au/programs/stay-on-your-feet/information-for-health-and-community-workers/
- Safe Exercise At Home: www.safeexerciseathome.org.au/for-health-professionals

Literature and articles

- Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines (2021): [Physical activity and exercise guidelines for all Australians | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/physical-activity-and-exercise-guidelines-for-all-australians)
- Journal article on behaviour change interventions to increase physical activity in hospitalised patients (Taylor et al., 2022): pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34304267/