

# The Importance of Physical Activity

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## Physical Activity. What is that?

Physical Activity is the concept of moving and training the body in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Physical activity can involve many things such as going to the gym, playing sports, jogging in the park, walking to work or even taking dance classes. Unfortunately, as our lives and jobs are becoming more sedentary (i.e. driving cars, sitting at a desk), society is becoming less active. This is leading to more physical injuries, poorer postures and illnesses.

## Why be active?

South Asians are genetically disposed for conditions such as high blood pressure (HBP), high cholesterol (HCL) and diabetes (DM). Once these are diagnosed, most people are on medication for the rest of their lives. An alternative (and healthier) method of managing these conditions is exercise. Regular activity, even if light, can reverse the effects of HBP, HCL and DM. In fact, exercise can prevent the onset of these conditions and eliminate the need to be medicated.



Furthermore, exercise has also shown to help with physical conditions such as osteoarthritis, degenerative disc disease and whiplash. Exercise also helps improve your cognition (mental state) and lowers your chance of mental disease and depression. The most obvious reason for activity is the maintenance of healthy weight. The right type of exercises can also improve your posture, increase your strength and make you feel better about yourself.

## What if it hurts or if I have an injury?

All the better reason to exercise! If you feel pain during or after a certain type of activity, that usually indicates your muscles are not prepared for the task. For example, if you have never run a marathon before, your body will hurt the first time you do it! Hence you will need to train your body by doing lighter exercises first and then progressing.

If you have an injury or illness such as arthritis, you should consult with a professional such as a physiotherapist who will help you learn the correct exercises. A physiotherapist can teach you exercises that will heal your injury along with those that will allow you to do regular activities pain free.



## What type of activity should I do?

Group classes can be beneficial but exercises and physical activity should be geared to individual goals and needs. There are plenty of options that exist around you to become more physically active. For example: join your school gym or YMCA; take your dog for a walk; go for a light jog in the park; or a swim in your community pool. You can even enlist yourself in dancing lessons! Again, if you are unsure, consult with a physical therapist for an individualized program.

## How long do I stay active for?

Physical activity is a lifelong habit! This doesn't mean you need to exercise every day. It means you need to incorporate activity into your lifestyle. For example, if your office or apartment is on the second floor, take the stairs instead of the elevator. Park further away so you have to walk longer. Encourage your spouse, family or friends to become active as well. It is always fun to do things in a group. Don't only enroll your children into academic activities, but athletic ones as well.

Studies have found that the most successful people are both academically and athletically gifted. Exercise releases endorphins that help the brain function better. Therefore you need homework for your brain and your body!



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