

Pfizer Australia

HEALTH REPORT

ISSUE #39

INACTIVE AUSTRALIA

Welcome to the latest Pfizer Australia Health Report. In this edition we take a look at one of the secrets of a better life – exercise!

The good news is that moderate regular exercise can provide proven health benefits and the prospect of a life free from much illness and incapacity. But our latest research, conducted in conjunction with Sports Medicine Australia (SMA), reveals that as a nation, almost half of us are still not meeting these moderate levels of exercise.

Long hours at work, lengthy commuting times and a lack of recreational facilities in the workplace are contributing to our sedentary lifestyles. And it is likely to cost us dearly in terms of our health and well-being.

Disturbingly, one in five Australians neglect to walk even ten consecutive minutes in the course of a week. Yet as little as 30 minutes of brisk walking each day can make a significant difference to our health.

And while exercise doesn't have to be vigorous to be effective, the myth: 'no pain, no gain' remains firmly in place. Our findings show close to one in two Australians still wrongly believe

we need to 'puff, pant and sweat' to achieve health benefits from physical activity.

In addition to considering the pluses of physical activity for our own health and well being, the challenge for us all is to avoid passing our national obesity epidemic to our children. Already, over 70 percent of Australian adults believe our children are less active than we were as youngsters.

Our report findings are based on responses from 1,454 Australian adults in research conducted by independent consultants, Stollznow Research.

The Pfizer Australia Health Report is produced monthly in collaboration with health consumer organisations and medical experts, and provides information and news to help you and your families live a happier, healthier lifestyle.

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EXERCISE – ONE OF THE KEYS TO LONGER LIFE!

Why is exercise and physical activity so important for us? The answer is simple. You are more likely to live a better and healthier life!

You're also likely to save on medical bills without adding to the nation's healthcare costs.

Research into the effects of exercise, or the lack of it, on the human body is one of the fastest growing areas of scientific investigation. In Australia, one of the largest of these studies - the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health - looked at the health of more than 40,000 Australian women over the last ten years. It clearly shows that those who do more physical activity live longer and healthier lives.

This is just one example in a wealth of research that has shown physical activity helps to prevent chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, some cancers, osteoporosis and lung problems. It also promotes better mental health and can help to reduce stress. For older people, physical activity is also important for maintaining functional ability and mobility. It is vitally important to maintain strength, flexibility and balance with age in order to avoid falls and fractures.

Our story 'Physical Activity: how much is enough?' (see page 4) looks more closely at just how much physical activity is appropriate for different age groups and situations. There are some simple facts to remember:

- Some activity, no matter how small, is better than no activity at all. In fact, research shows that the greatest health



benefits occur when we go from no activity to just a little activity!

- Don't be discouraged if physical activity doesn't change your weight. Increasing activity on its own is unlikely to have much impact on weight. However it will improve your health.
- For older people, improving strength and balance will help prevent falls and fractures.

The most important thing to remember about physical activity is that you don't need to strain, hurt or over-exert yourself to enjoy the benefits. This is especially important if you haven't been active, exercised or played sport for some time. Remember to start slowly and listen to your body. If it hurts or you feel pain – slow down or stop.

Keep moving Australia

A national survey of physical activity levels conducted by Pfizer Australia and Sports Medicine Australia (SMA), reveals that, despite extensive education campaigns and millions of dollars in government spending, nearly half of all Australians are still not sufficiently active for good health.

This alarming new research - the first national survey of physical health since 2001, shows that one in five Australians neglect to walk for even ten consecutive minutes in the course of a week.

The research attributes the high level of inactivity to the long hours spent at work, increasingly lengthy commute times, and a lack of recreational options or support facilities in the workplace to encourage physical activity.

This has prompted experts to identify the workplace as the next frontier in the battle to overcome the nation's obesity epidemic.

And the welcome news is that there is a solution. Contrary to popular belief the amount of daily exercise required for good health is not huge. According to current guidelines, all that is required is 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity, like brisk walking. This can even be broken down into two 15-minute blocks and still be effective.

Despite this the Pfizer Australia Health Report has found that close to one in two Australians (46 percent) still wrongly believe you need to



'puff, pant and sweat' to get health benefits from physical activity.

Professor Wendy Brown from the University of Queensland and Sports Medicine Australia says getting moderate intensity physical activity at work is easy. "It can be as simple as getting out of the boardroom and initiating walking meetings. It may not be possible for large meetings with numerous people, but instead of sitting down face-to-face with someone, why not get outside and walk while you talk?"

"Physical activity offers many benefits beyond the prevention of obesity. We really need to start looking at ways of making it easier for workers to fit physical activity into their day. This is an issue which impacts on various levels of government policy including transport, roads and housing."

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Before producing the Pfizer Australia Health Report, Pfizer Australia and Sports Medicine Australia surveyed people about their current levels of physical activity. We found that close to half (46%) of all adult Australians are still not meeting the minimum activity requirements for good health – 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week.

Part of the problem with getting started – or increasing physical activity – is knowing how to start, how much is enough and how much is too much.

Sports Medicine Australia has a basic guideline for Australian adults: *“Everyone should try to do a minimum of 30 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity on most days (at least five) of the week.”*

The Australian Government Department of Health & Ageing website has detailed physical activity guideline information for all Australians. <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/portal-Physical+activity>

This includes information for children, adults and older Australians.

Physical Activity Recommendations for 5-12 year olds

A combination of moderate and vigorous activities for at least 60 minutes a day is recommended.

Physical Activity Recommendations for 12-18 year olds

At least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day is recommended.



This activity can be built up throughout the day with a variety of activities. Examples of moderate activities include a brisk walk, a bike ride or any sort of active play.

More vigorous activities will make kids “huff and puff” and include organised sports such as football and netball, as well as activities such as ballet, running and swimming laps. Children typically accumulate activity in intermittent bursts ranging from a few seconds to several minutes, so any sort of active play will usually include some vigorous activity.

Most importantly, children need the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities that are fun and which suit their interests, skills and abilities. Variety will also offer children a range of health benefits, experiences and challenges.

Children shouldn't spend more than two hours a day using electronic media for entertainment (for example, computer games, TV, internet), particularly during daylight hours.

Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults

The Department of Health details four steps for better health for Australian adults. Steps 1 to 3 recommend the minimum amount of physical activity needed to enhance health. They are not intended for high-level fitness, sports training or weight loss. To achieve best results, try to carry out all three steps and combine an active lifestyle with healthy eating.

Step 4 is for those who are able, and wish, to achieve greater health and fitness benefits.

Step 1 - Think of movement as an opportunity, not an inconvenience

For example, be happy if you are forced to park further away from your destination. Look upon the extra walk as an opportunity to "get your steps up".

Step 2 - Be active every day in as many ways as you can

Make a habit of walking or cycling instead of using the car. Park further from your destination or do things yourself instead of using labour-saving devices; always take the stairs instead of a lift or escalator.

Step 3 - Put together at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably every, day

You can accumulate your 30 minutes (or more) throughout the day by combining a few shorter sessions of activity of around 10 to 15 minutes each. A useful target is 10,000 steps a day. A reliable pedometer, or step counter, can be a good motivator and will tell you if you reach your target.

Step 4 - If you can, enjoy some regular, vigorous activity for extra health and fitness

This step does not replace Steps 1 to 3. Rather it adds an extra level for those who are able, and wish, to achieve greater health and

fitness benefits. Vigorous activity makes your heart beat faster and may cause you to "huff and puff" – especially if you are unfit. If you are unaccustomed to this type of activity, start slowly and do not overdo it.

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) has recently further updated its guidelines for adult physical activity. The updated guideline states:

- Do moderately intense cardio 30 minutes a day, five days a week, or
- Do vigorously intense cardio 20 minutes a day, 3 days a week, and
- Do 8 to 10 strength-training exercises, 8 to 12 repetitions of each exercise twice a week.

Moderate intensity cardio means working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat, yet still being able to carry on a conversation.

The ACSM also has physical activity guidelines for older adults:

Guidelines for adults over age 65 (or adults aged 50 to 64 with chronic conditions, such as arthritis)

- Do moderately intense aerobic exercise 30 minutes a day, five days a week, or
- Do vigorously intense aerobic exercise 20 minutes a day, 3 days a week, and
- Do 8 to 10 strength-training exercises, 10 to 15 repetitions of each exercise twice to three times per week, and
- If you are at risk of falling, perform balance exercises, and
- Have a physical activity plan.

Both aerobic (longer duration) and muscle-strengthening (shorter duration) activity are

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AVOIDING INJURY AND EXERCISING SAFELY

Mythbusters:

- “No pain, no gain” – BUSTED!
- “I need to see a doctor before I start physical activity” – BUSTED!

No pain no gain? Do you have to really work hard, and puff and pant and sweat to get benefit from physical activity?

From the Pfizer Australia Health Report Survey, we found many people still think this is true. It is not. In fact, the greatest health benefit occurs when sedentary people go from doing no physical activity to doing some – like a 15 minute walk each day.

On the other hand, it is important not to go to the other extreme and do so much exercise that you injure yourself, which may force you to be inactive. The greatest danger of injury occurs when a person takes up physical activity or sport after a long period of inactivity. For that reason, it is important that anyone in this situation should gradually build up the intensity and duration of physical activity. Warming up, cooling down and stretching will also help prevent injury.

Learn to “listen to your body”. Your body will tell you if you are over-doing things. If you feel pain, stop or slow down.

Should I see a doctor before starting?

It is not usually necessary for people - even older people - to consult a doctor before commencing gentle exercise or walking. However, if you have been sedentary for some time, or if you have any medical conditions that might be a problem and want to do more vigorous exercise you should consult a doctor or exercise physiologist.



Medical advice should be sought by those who have health problems (such as heart disease, diabetes or high blood pressure), or if you get symptoms such as light-headedness, dizziness or persistent pain when exercising.

Tips for avoiding injuries

- If starting physical activity after a long lay-off, build up the activity level slowly. Do NOT think that you can pick up a sport where you may have left off ten years ago.
- Start with low impact activity, like walking, cycling or swimming.
- Remember to “Gear Up” – even walking requires sensible shoes, a hat and probably sunglasses and sun screen. Using appropriate protective equipment becomes particularly important when playing sport.
- Listen to your body – if you feel pain or discomfort, slow down or stop.

- If you do experience injury, be sure to see a doctor or qualified sports medicine professional for treatment.

Smartplay Injury Prevention

Sport is a great way to get outside and have some fun while increasing your physical activity. And by taking a few simple strategies on board, it's possible to enjoy sport while reducing the risk of injury.

Sportplay is a sport safety and injury prevention program that aims to reduce the incidence of sporting injuries. By following the program's motto – 'Warm up, Drink up, Gear up' adults and children alike can help prevent injury.

Let's take a closer look at what's involved.

'Warm Up'

It is essential for both adults and children to properly warm up before exercise, and include age appropriate stretching exercises to prevent muscle injury. Remember to cool down after exercising also.

'Drink Up'

Re-hydrate before, during and after exercise. Take a bottle of water with you when playing sport or whenever you're engaged in physical activity.

'Gear Up'

A range of equipment is available to prevent sporting injury. Don't just buy it though. Use it.

Mouth guards should be worn at all times if there is a risk of injury to the teeth. Taping can reduce the incidence of re-injury. And gear as simple as sunscreen and a hat are a must for many outdoors sports.

If injury does occur, seeking prompt appropriate treatment from a qualified sports medicine professional can greatly enhance recovery times.

For more on Smartplay log onto www.smartplay.com.au.



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critical for healthy aging. Moderate intensity aerobic exercise means working hard at about a level-6 intensity on a scale of 10. You should still be able to carry on a conversation during exercise.

Aerobic activities include brisk walking, swimming, cycling, golf (no cart!), aerobics, washing the car (especially with a bucket), tennis, dancing, mopping and vacuuming. Strength activities include weight, strength or resistance training exercises, lifting and carrying (e.g. groceries or small children), climbing stairs, moderate yard work (digging or shifting soil) and calisthenics (push ups and sit ups).

The ACSM advises that older adults or adults with chronic conditions should develop an activity plan with a health professional to manage risks and take therapeutic needs into account. This will maximise the benefits of physical activity and ensure your safety.

www.acsm.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home_Page&TEMPLATE=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=7764

WEB LINKS

SPORTS MEDICINE AUSTRALIA - www.sma.org.au

AUSTRALIA ON THE MOVE - www.australiaonthemove.com.au

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & AGEING -

www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-active-index.htm

THE NATIONAL HEART FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA - www.heartfoundation.com.au

SMART PLAY - www.smartplay.com.au



OTHER KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE

- 66 percent of all Australians did not meet recommended guidelines for moderate intensity physical activity in the last week.
- 16 percent of Australians were classified as completely sedentary.
- Over 70 percent of Australian adults believe children under 18 years today are less physically active than themselves at the same age.

AVOID SITTING WHERE POSSIBLE

Researchers have found that one of the major reasons that we do less activity today is because we spend more time sitting down. We sit more at work, in our cars and in front of screens. As well as doing more physical activity, try sitting LESS.

