



Cumbria, Northumberland,
Tyne and Wear
NHS Foundation Trust

The benefits of physical activity for mental and physical health

Information leaflet

Contents

Movement is medicine	3
Physical health benefits	3
Benefits on mental health	4
Exercise recommendations	5
What are the current physical activity guidelines?	6
What is physical activity?	6
Top tips to get started	8
What will help me to be more physically active?	8
How exercise has benefitted CNTW service users	9
Help is at hand	10
References	11

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.

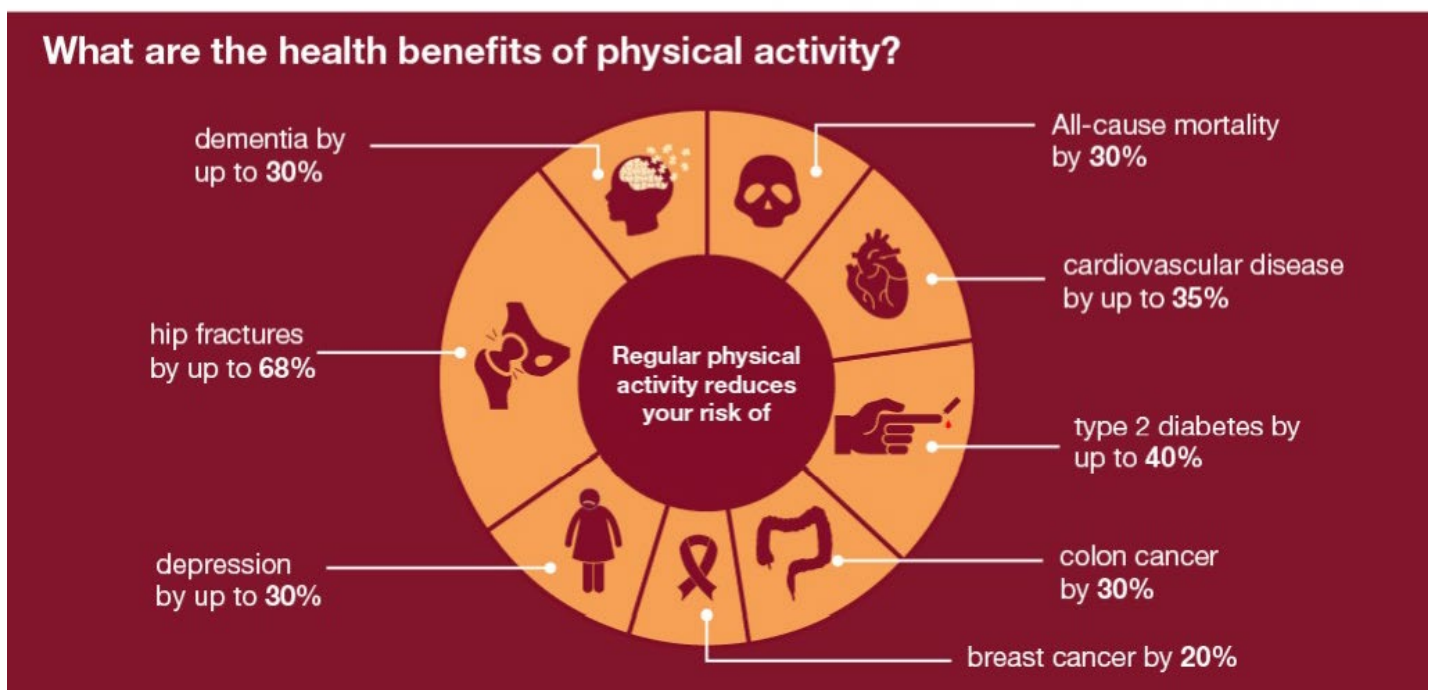
Compared to the general population individuals with serious mental illness:

- 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 time 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.

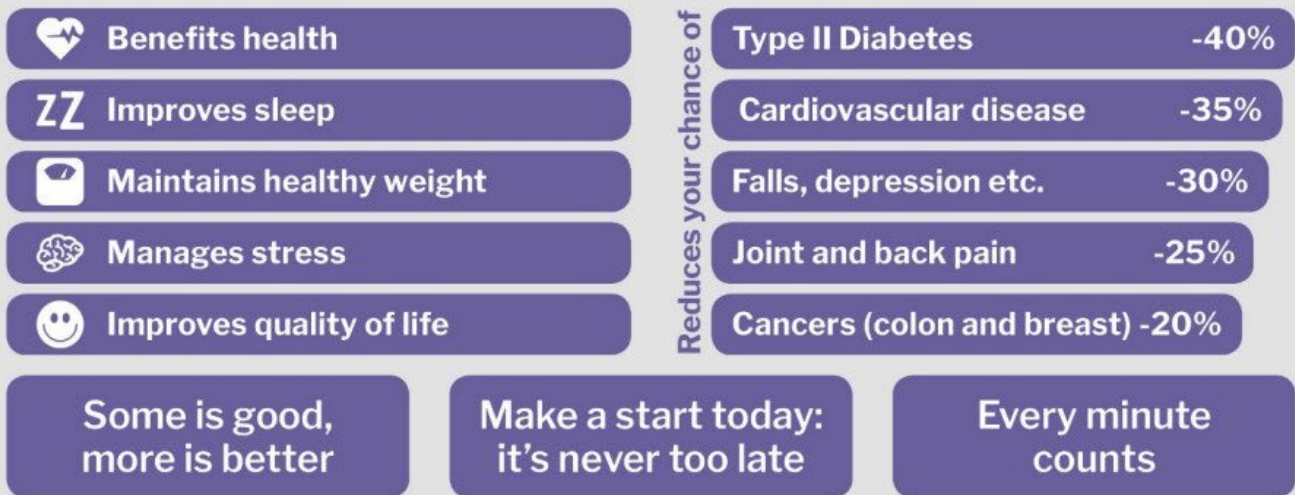
Physical health benefits

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:

Physical activity for adults and older adults



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**.

Benefits on mental health

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.

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

Individuals with serious mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, are significantly less physically active. Physical activity has been shown to treat both the positive and negative symptoms of schizophrenia, when used in combination with medication.

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.

What are the current physical activity guidelines?

What should you do?

For a healthy heart and mind

To keep your muscles, bones and joints strong

To reduce your chance of falls

Be Active		Sit Less	Build Strength	Improve Balance
VIGOROUS	MODERATE			
RUN	WALK	TV	GYM	DANCE
SPORT	CYCLE	SOFA	YOGA	TAI CHI
STAIRS	SWIM	COMPUTER	CARRY BAGS	BOWLS
MINUTES PER WEEK 75 OR 150 VIGOROUS INTENSITY (BREATHING FAST, DIFFICULTY TALKING) MODERATE INTENSITY (INCREASED BREATHING, ABLE TO TALK) OR A COMBINATION OF BOTH		BREAK UP SITTING TIME	2 DAYS PER WEEK	

Something is better than nothing.
Start small and build up gradually: just 10 minutes at a time provides benefit.
MAKE A START TODAY: it's never too late!

UK Chief Medical Officers' Guidelines 2011 **Start Active, Stay Active:** <http://bit.ly/startactive>

What is physical activity?

Physical activity is any bodily movement that requires energy expenditure and improves health and wellbeing (World Health Organisation 2024)

Some examples of physical activity are:

- Walking
- Jogging
- Swimming
- Cycling
- Climbing stairs
- Gardening
- Carrying shopping
- Dancing

- Housework
- Weight lifting
- Playing with your children
- Sports
- Yoga



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Moderate physical activity should increase your heart rate and breathing rate. You should still be able to hold a conversation whilst completing the activity.

Did you know as little as **10 minutes of brisk walking per day** for seven days can have the following benefits:

- Increased physical fitness
- Improved ability to complete activities of daily living, such as walking up stairs or carrying your shopping bags.
- Improved mood
- Improved quality of life
- Healthier weight and lower percentage of body fat
- 15% reduction in risk of early death

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 to make sure that the exercise or activity is appropriate and safe for you.

Start by making small changes towards being more physically active. You could try to:

- Use the stairs where possible.
- Set an alarm for regular intervals to remind you to get up and move more.
- Complete seated exercises.
- Get off the bus one stop earlier than normal.
- Park your car further away.
- Get up and dance.
- Walk instead of driving where possible.

What will help me to be more physically active?

- Get family or friends involved - practical and emotional support from friends, family or experts really does help improve motivation levels.
- Plan activities into your daily routine.
- Start small and build up.
- 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?

Choose an activity you enjoy and you will be more motivated to stick to it.

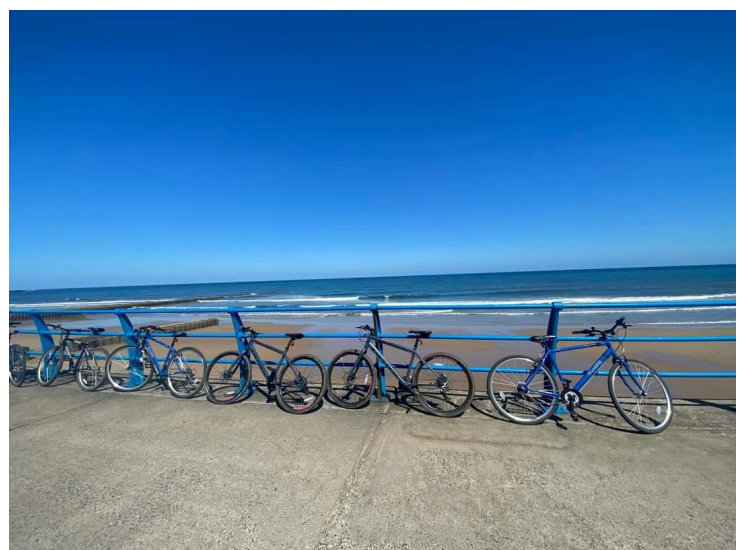
How exercise has benefitted CNTW service users

“I’d never thought about using the gym. It gave me confidence, I look forward to it now.”



“Exercise, fresh air, chatting and talking gets my mind off things.”

“Gym and exercise keeps me happy and elevates my mood”



“It makes me feel better. A sense of achievement.”

Help is at hand

Visit the Trust's 'A Weight Off Your Mind' page

www.cntw.nhs.uk/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 has lots of useful information on fitness and training, nutrition, healthy eating and weight loss. This includes podcasts and training guides.

www.nhs.uk/live-well/

Visit this page www.nhs.uk/better-health/lose-weight/ to find the free NHS 12 week Weight Loss plan. Find out what a healthy diet looks like when you're trying to lose weight, and tips, tricks and advice on healthy eating and managing your weight.

Public Health England has a number of campaigns available to help you to increase your activity levels, with many available as phone apps to support you along the way. Apps include Couch to 5K and Active 10



You can find further information, plus the links to download these two apps, on www.nhs.uk/better-health/get-active/

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.
- [Primary Prevention - Improves mental health - Moving Medicine](#)

Websites listed above were accessed in October 2024 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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Tel: 0191 246 7288

Published by the Patient Information Centre

2024 Copyright Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS
Foundation Trust

Ref, PIC/716/1124 November 2024 V5

www.cntw.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0191 246 7288

Review date 2027

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