

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDE TO HEALTHY ACTIVE LIVING

During the winter time, many of Calgarians choose to stay home and cuddle inside their warm blankets. There may be many reasons why you are staying at the comfort of your home, however, physical activity is one of the most important things you can do to maintain your physical and mental health and quality of life as you get older. Furthermore, physical inactivity makes your body age faster!

So here are some common reasons why you are hesitant to commit to physical activities and some suggestions from Healthy Living Unit at Public Health Agency of Canada:

1. I don't want to exercise

I've worked hard all my life, now it's time to relax.

Being active can help you to relax and prolong your independence. Build physical activity into your daily routine. Set yourself a small goal. Staying active is important to your physical and mental health in your retirement years. You have already taken a first step by reading this Guide and Handbook. Choose things that you like to do. Join in activities with people you like to be with. Start with small steps.

Find one activity that you could try, or do more of what you are already doing.

- Take your grandchild for a walk - grandchildren have so much energy, it might inspire you.
- Take a dog for a walk.
- Join your neighbour for a walk.
- Walk to the grocery store and carry home the groceries.
- Do some stretching every day.
- Join a class at the community centre.
- Join a mall-walking program.
- Wash and wax the car.
- Use a wheelchair? No problem, "wheeling" can be as beneficial as walking.

2. I have arthritis or stiff joints

Then it is even more important that you make a commitment to doing gentle movements every day to keep your joints flexible. Small amounts of daily activity can make a huge difference and keep you mobile.

Flexibility and strength activities are essential to keep your muscles and joints healthy so that you stay mobile. The more sedentary your lifestyle, the stiffer your joints will become. Seek professional help if you are unsure about what is safe for you.

Here are some suggested activities:

- Home stretching routines
- Aqua fitness programs
- Specialty classes for people with arthritis
- Walking/wheeling
- T'ai Chi
- Folk or line dancing

3. I have osteoporosis

Bones lose minerals and strength as people age. Serious bone loss is a problem for about 25% of older people. You can prevent some of this bone loss with strength activities.

Your muscles and bones have to be challenged to get stronger or to maintain their strength as you age. Join a beginner's program to learn some techniques that will help you improve your strength. It will help you maintain your independence and quality of life. Ask your doctor or health-care provider what would be safe for you. If you have osteoporosis, being active will still be of great benefit, but activities may need to be adapted to provide that benefit without putting you at risk.

Here are some suggested activities:

- Resistance training that challenges your muscles and bones
- Aqua fitness programs

- Walking
- Folk or line dancing
- Specialized classes for people with osteoporosis

4. I have concerns about my heart. I'm afraid that physical activity will do more harm than good.

Doctors usually recommend activity programs for heart patients. Talk to your doctor or other health-care professional and choose a program that is right for you.

They will probably recommend walking, which is one of the best activities to stimulate your circulation, improve the pumping of your heart, strengthen your lungs, improve your mood, and provide energy to your muscles.

Check out some good walking paths in your community and do one each day to get you started. Ask a friend to join you and make your walk a social outing. Join a mall-walking program where you can meet new people.

Here are some suggested activities:

- Walking at a moderate pace progressing to a brisk pace as you are able
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Skating
- Cross-country skiing
- Cycling
- Specialized programs for people with heart conditions

5. I am unsteady on my feet.

If your balance is poor, start by doing some activities on a chair, on your bed, or supported by a wall. As you feel stronger, add more activities. You will notice that your strength and balance increase as you progress. If you are not sure what to do, seek help from a health-care professional.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Exercises in a sitting or lying position
- Simple yoga movements or stretching
- Slow walking with a cane or with the support of a friend
- Leg and ankle strengthening
- T'ai Chi
- Line dancing while holding hands

6. I'm afraid to go out in winter.

There are devices to help you deal with the ice and snow. You can get "picks" to add to your cane to grip the ice. Get some boots that will give your feet a firm grip. Some people use old ski poles to steady themselves or they buy cleats for their boots. If you still feel that it is unsafe for you to walk outside, try a mall-walking program or, if you live in an apartment, walk the halls.

Check out activity programs in your neighbourhood. Often the staff can help you arrange transportation to an activity. Check out what your neighbours and friends are doing and see if you can join them.

The key is to keep moving, even in winter.

For more information, you can visit Healthy Living Unit's website at:

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/older/index.html>

Source: Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Living for Older Adults, Healthy Living Unit, Public Health Agency of Canada Website.

To speak to a health professional, contact your family doctor or speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling: Calgary Health Link at 403-943-LINK (5465) or toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465). Mandarin Health Link 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link 403-943-1556.