



The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland



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Foreword

Promoting physical activity complements national strategies to improve nutrition, and to reduce tobacco, drug and alcohol use. It also impacts positively on efforts to enhance social environments through reduced violence and improved social interaction and integration. These widespread benefits underpin the need to establish and integrate public policy on physical activity in the context of health, education, environment, sport and transport at national and local levels.

The publication of The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland is an important step in this process. The guidelines establish a national consensus, based on international expert opinion and evidence, on appropriate levels of health enhancing physical activity for the Irish population.

We would like to thank the National Physical Activity Guidelines Steering Group for their hard work and dedication in developing the guidelines. They present clear, concise and user friendly guidance to support the public, professionals and policy makers in promoting physical activity across the population.

Despite the overwhelming evidence, much of our population is not sufficiently active to reap the health gain of physical activity. While increased physical activity levels benefit all, there is strong evidence that the greatest health benefits occur when the least active in the population become moderately active. The translation of these guidelines into action presents a unique opportunity to focus our efforts on a shared vision and framework for action to support everyone – children, young people, adults, older people and people with disabilities – to be as active as they can and enjoy the innumerable benefits.

Therefore, the challenge is to consider how you, your colleagues and your organisation and community can contribute to this important task. We encourage you to identify opportunities for empowering and supporting people to achieve their goal of **being active every day in as many ways as they can.**

Dr Tony Holohan

Chief Medical Officer

Department of Health and Children

Dr Patrick Doorley

National Director – Population Health

Health Service Executive



Membership of the National Physical Activity Guidelines Steering Group

Members:

Maria Lordan-Dunphy (Chair), Health Promotion Development Manager, Health Service Executive

Brian Mullen, Principal Officer, Health Promotion Policy Unit, Department of Health and Children

Dr Niamh Murphy, Department of Health Sport and Exercise Science and Centre for Health Behaviour Research, Waterford Institute of Technology

Shirley O'Shea, Senior Health Promotion Officer, HSE South

Peter Smyth, Research Manager, Irish Sports Council

Fiona Coyne, Participation Manager, Irish Sports Council

Maureen Mulvihill, Health Promotion Manager, Irish Heart Foundation

Patricia Lee, Assistant Principal Officer, Health Promotion Policy Unit, Department of Health and Children

Dr Catherine Woods, Department of Health and Human Performance, Dublin City University

Dr Ciaran MacDonncha, Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Limerick

Dr Marie H Murphy, Head of School of Sport Studies, University of Ulster, Jordanstown

Geraldine Hanna, Social Marketing, Communications and Advocacy Function Manager, Health Service Executive

Adrienne Lynam, Project Manager - Implementation National Task Force on Obesity, Health Service Executive

We wish to thank all of the people and organisations who made a contribution to the development of the guidelines (see page 26).



Introduction

The Health Service Executive (HSE) and Department of Health and Children have produced **The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland** to support the promotion of physical activity in Ireland. These guidelines aim to:

- emphasise the importance of physical activity to the health of all Irish people; and
- outline the recommendations for physical activity for people of all ages and abilities.

The guidelines begin the process of setting national policy on physical activity in Ireland in terms of health, education, environment, sport and transport. According to the World Health Organisation, physical activity “interacts positively with strategies to improve diet, discourages the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, helps reduce violence, enhances functional capacity and promotes social interaction and integration.” (WHO, 2003)

The steering group reviewed international research (see page 25) and consulted with professionals in Ireland, Australia, the US and the UK (see page 26), to ensure that the guidelines reflect the international expertise and evidence which support the importance of physical activity for people’s health.

Who are the guidelines for?

The guidelines will be useful to everyone involved in promoting health and physical activity in Ireland including:

- health promotion and public health workers;
- health professionals such as GPs, physiotherapists, nurses, dietitians and occupational health workers;
- teaching and non-teaching staff at pre-school, primary, secondary and third level;
- local sports partnerships, sports trainers, coaches, health and fitness trainers, personal trainers and club volunteers; and
- youth workers such as youth club leaders, children’s activity club leaders and after-school service leaders.

The key message is that **physical activity is for everyone, and any level of activity is better for your health than none.** The guidelines include recommendations for children and young people, adults, people with disabilities and older people.

Why is it important to promote physical activity?



Regular physical activity is the key to getting healthy and staying healthy yet studies show that few Irish people take part in regular physical activity (SLÁN 1999, 2002, 2007). People use car transport more than ever and technological advances mean that our working lives are more likely to be inactive, such as sitting at a computer.

How active are Irish people?

The National Survey of Lifestyles Attitudes and Nutrition (SLÁN 2007) showed that only 41% of Irish adults took part in moderate or strenuous physical activity for at least 20 minutes three or more times a week. This level of activity has not changed much over the past ten years – 40% in 2002 compared with 38% in 1998. We do not have specific data for people with disabilities taking part in physical activity (NDA, 2005).



The Health Behaviours in School Children (HBSC, 2006) survey revealed that over half of primary school age children did not achieve the recommended level of physical activity. By 15 years of age, almost nine out of 10 girls and seven out of 10 boys don't achieve the recommended level.

Percentage of children who get the recommended level of physical activity (60 minutes a day)

Age	Boys	Girls
11 years	51%	38%
13 years	39%	29%
15 years	27%	13%

Figures taken from HBSC 2006

Adults start to get health benefits from at least 150 minutes a week of moderate physical activity, such as brisk walking. This means an average of 30 minutes of activity on five days a week. Children and young people need at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity. It is clear from the SLÁN and HBSC studies that most Irish adults and children are not active enough to be healthy.

How physical activity benefits health

Although many people think of health in terms of illness, health is a positive concept that covers your physical, mental and social well-being (Department of Health and Children, 2000). Physical activity benefits every aspect of your health.

Regular physical activity reduces your risk of chronic diseases, such as coronary heart disease (CHD), type 2 diabetes, stroke, cancer, osteoporosis and depression. For older people regular physical activity reduces the risk of falls and resulting injuries. US studies show that **regular physical activity reduces many health risks** for everyone – children, adolescents, adults, people with disabilities and older adults, across all ethnic groups (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008). As you get more active, more often and for longer you reduce your risk of chronic disease.

Obesity is a major public health concern in Ireland (Department of Health and Children, 2005). The less active you are, the more you are at risk of being overweight. The 2007 SLÁN report showed that 38% of Irish people were overweight and another 23% were obese. When the figures from SLÁN 2007 are compared with figures from previous SLÁN surveys and the 1999 North/South Ireland Food Consumption Survey (Irish Universities Nutritional Alliance 2001), they show that there has been a notable increase in the levels of overweight and obesity. One in five Irish children and teenagers is overweight or obese (Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance, 2008).

To be a healthy weight, you need to take regular physical activity and eat a healthy diet. This ensures a balance between the energy you get from food and the energy you use.

Even when you do not lose weight, you may still benefit from being more active. Studies show that active adults who are overweight or obese gain similar health benefits to people with a healthy body weight.



Health benefits of physical activity – summary of evidence

(US Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008)

Children and young people

Strong evidence of:

- better cardio-respiratory and muscular fitness
- stronger bones
- better cardiovascular and metabolic health
- healthier body fat composition

Some evidence of:

- reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression

All adults (including adults with disabilities and older adults)

Strong evidence of:

- better cardio-respiratory and muscular fitness
- less weight gain
- more weight loss – combined with eating fewer calories
- better weight maintenance after weight loss
- lower risk of early death
- lower risk of stroke
- lower risk of coronary heart disease
- lower risk of high blood pressure
- lower risk of unhealthy blood lipid profile
- lower risk of type 2 diabetes
- lower risk of metabolic syndrome
- lower risk of colon and breast cancer
- fewer falls
- reduced levels of depression
- better cognitive function in older adults

Some evidence of:

- lower risk of hip fracture
- lower risk of lung cancer
- lower risk of endometrial cancer
- stronger bone density
- better sleep quality
- reduced abdominal fat



Cost benefits of physical activity

The healthcare system would benefit from reduced costs if people became more active. An Australian study estimated that if Australian people became more active for just 30 minutes per day, it could save \$1.5 billion (€815 million) a year in costs linked to CHD, stroke, type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, colon cancer, depression and falls. This equals 17% of the total health costs linked with the medical conditions included in the study (Medibank, 2007).

The level of inactivity in Ireland is even higher than in Australia, so the possible cost benefits of increased activity may be even greater.

In the USA, an investment of \$1 in physical activity (time and equipment) leads to \$3.2 in medical cost savings. The cost linked with inactivity and obesity was some 9.4% of the national health expenditure in 1995. Workplace activity programmes in the USA can reduce short-term sick leave by between 6 – 32%, reduce health care costs by 20 – 55% and increase productivity by 2 – 52%. In Canada physical inactivity results in about 6% of total health care costs (WHO, 2003).

Two European studies have calculated that physical inactivity can cost about €150 – 300 per citizen per year (Martin et al, 2001 and UK Department of Health, 2001). Increasing current levels of physical activity could significantly reduce the costs to society, but even maintaining them can result in savings (WHO, 2006).

Possible risks

The benefits of physical activity far outweigh the possible risks. Few people are likely to injure themselves taking part in moderate intensity activities for the duration recommended in the guidelines.

Evidence shows that only one injury occurs for every 1000 hours of walking activity, and fewer than four injuries occur for every 1000 hours of running. The most common injuries are minor, short-lived musculo-skeletal ones, such as straining a muscle or tendon.

You can reduce the possible risks by:

- increasing the level of physical activity gradually over a period of time;
- wearing suitable clothes and footwear;
- using appropriate equipment and protective equipment; and
- being active in safe places.

Physical activity guidelines for Ireland





Guidelines for children and young people (aged 2 –18)

All children and young people should be active, at a moderate to vigorous level, for at least 60 minutes every day.

Include muscle-strengthening, flexibility and bone-strengthening exercises 3 times a week.

Moderate activity	Vigorous activity
Heart is beating faster than normal, breathing is harder than normal.	Heart is beating much faster than normal and breathing is much harder than normal.

Moderate to vigorous activity includes everything from sport, physical education (PE) and formal exercise to active play and other physically demanding activities such as dancing, swimming or skateboarding. It also includes everyday activities such as walking and cycling.

Activities for children and young people should match their age, skill level and maturity. Choose a variety of fun activities. Most activity should be moderate to vigorous aerobic. At least three times a week, include activities that promote muscle strengthening, flexibility and bone strengthening.

Type of activity	Children	Young people
Aerobic moderate intensity	Active recreation, such as hiking, skateboarding, roller-blading Bicycle riding Brisk walking PE class	Active recreation, such as canoeing, hiking, skateboarding, roller-blading Brisk walking Bicycle riding Housework and garden work, such as sweeping or pushing a lawn mower Games of catch and throw, such as olympic handball, frisbee and rounders PE class



Type of activity	Children	Young people
Aerobic vigorous intensity	<p>Active games involving running and chasing, such as tag</p> <p>Bicycle riding</p> <p>Jumping rope</p> <p>Martial arts, such as karate</p> <p>Running</p> <p>Sports such as gaelic football, hurling, soccer, rugby, basketball, swimming, tennis</p>	<p>Active games involving running and chasing</p> <p>Bicycle riding</p> <p>Jumping rope</p> <p>Martial arts such as karate</p> <p>Boxing</p> <p>Running</p> <p>Sports such as gaelic football, hurling, soccer, rugby, basketball, swimming, tennis</p> <p>Vigorous dancing</p>
Muscle strengthening	<p>Games such as tug-of-war</p> <p>Modified push-ups (with knees on the floor)</p> <p>Resistance exercises using body weight or resistance bands</p> <p>Rope climbing</p> <p>Sit-ups (curl-ups or crunches)</p> <p>Swinging on playground equipment or bars</p>	<p>Games such as tug-of-war</p> <p>Push-ups and pull-ups</p> <p>Resistance exercises with exercise bands, weight machines, hand-held weights</p> <p>Climbing walls</p> <p>Sit-ups (curl-ups or crunches)</p>
Bone strengthening	<p>Games such as hopscotch</p> <p>Hopping, skipping, jumping</p> <p>Jumping rope</p> <p>Running</p> <p>Sports such as gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, tennis</p>	<p>Hopping, skipping, jumping</p> <p>Jumping rope</p> <p>Running</p> <p>Sports such as gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, tennis</p>



For children who are not active

- Start off slowly. Build up to an extra 15 – 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity 1 – 2 days a week.
- Once you reach this, aim for 30 minutes of activity on most days of the week, for example progress from 30 minutes on 2 – 3 days a week, to 30 minutes on 3 – 4 days a week.
- Become more active for longer – include some days with 60 minutes or more and choose more vigorous activity.
- As you progress, you will get closer to the goal of 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

Give children and young people opportunities to be active every day during their normal family, school and community activities. This can include play, games, sports, work, recreation, PE, planned exercise or active travel such as cycling. For children and young people with disabilities, you will need to plan the facilities and programmes to make sure they cater for all ability levels. Increase physical activity by replacing sedentary time – watching TV, playing computer games, talking on the phone – with active time.

A child's natural patterns of movement differ from those of adults. Children are active in an intermittent way, they alternate short periods of activity with short periods of rest. Even a few minutes of moderate or vigorous activity counts toward the guidelines. This pattern of activity changes as children grow. They develop the skills to play organised games and sports and are able to stay active for longer. Young people may meet the guidelines through play, structured programmes, or both.



Guidelines for adults (aged 18–64)

At least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on 5 days a week (or 150 minutes a week).

Every adult should be active. Some physical activity is better than none, more is better than some, and any amount of physical activity you do gains some health benefits.

You can count shorter bouts of activity towards the guidelines. These bouts should last for at least 10 minutes. Add activities which increase muscular strength and endurance on 2 – 3 days per week.

Moderate activity	Vigorous activity
Increased breathing and heart rate, but still able to carry on a conversation. Warm or sweating slightly, comfortable pace.	Breathing heavily, cannot keep a conversation going, faster heart rate and sweating, concentrating hard.

Examples of moderate and vigorous activity for adults

Moderate aerobic activity	Vigorous aerobic activity
Brisk walking - a mile in 15 – 20 minutes	Jogging or running a mile in 10 minutes or faster.
Digging in the garden	Active sports such as football or soccer, squash, aerobics
Medium paced swimming	Circuit training
Water aerobics	Fast cycling (10 miles per hour or faster) or brisk rowing
Cycling slower than 10 miles per hour	Swimming lengths
Tennis (doubles)	Tennis (singles)
Ballroom dancing	Dancing such as quick step, hip hop, street, salsa, Irish dancing
General gardening	Skiping
	Heavy gardening (continuous digging or hoeing, heart rate increases)
	Hill-walking with a backpack



For more health benefits, increase your aerobic activity to 60 minutes of moderate activity 5 days a week. To meet the guidelines you can do either moderate or vigorous activities or a combination of both – for example 30 minutes brisk walking on two days a week plus 15 minutes of jogging on three days a week.

It takes less time to get the same benefit from vigorous activity compared to moderate activity. A general rule is that one minute of vigorous activity equals two minutes of moderate activity. So you could do vigorous activity for at least 75 minutes a week or 150 minutes of moderate activity. Ideally, spread your activity throughout the week. Add activity which increases muscular strength and endurance on two or more days a week (see below).

Examples of muscle strengthening and balance activities for adults

Muscle strengthening activities	Balance activities
Digging, lifting and carrying while gardening Carrying groceries Circuit training, step aerobics Exercises using exercise bands, weight machines, hand-held weights	Tai chi and yoga exercises Backward and sideways walking, and walking on heels and toes Standing from a sitting position Standing on one foot

If you have a diagnosed chronic condition such as diabetes, heart disease, or osteoarthritis or if you have symptoms such as chest pain or pressure, dizziness or joint pain, talk to your doctor before you increase your activity levels.



Guidelines for older people (aged 65 +)

At least 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity activity on five days a week, or 150 minutes a week. Focus on aerobic activity, muscle-strengthening and balance.

Every older person should be active. Some physical activity is better than none, more is better than some, and if you take part in any amount of physical activity you gain some health benefits.

You can count shorter bouts of activity towards the guidelines. These bouts should last for at least 10 minutes. Add activities which increase muscular strength and balance on 2 – 3 days per week to reduce your risk of falls.

Moderate activity	Vigorous activity
Increased breathing and heart rate, but still able to carry on a conversation. Warm or sweating slightly, comfortable pace.	Breathing heavily, cannot keep a conversation going, faster heart rate and sweating, concentrating hard.

Match your level of effort to your level of fitness. If chronic illness, lack of mobility or degenerative condition prevent you doing the recommended amount of physical activity, be as active as you are able to be. Talk to your doctor for advice on how to do regular physical activity safely.





Guidelines for adults with disabilities

Be as active as your ability allows. Aim to meet adult guidelines of at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity on 5 days a week.

All people with disabilities should be active. Some physical activity is better than none, more is better than some, and if you take part in any amount of physical activity you gain some health benefits.

Be as active as your ability allows and aim to achieve the adult guidelines as described on page 13. You can count shorter bouts of at least 10 minutes of moderate activity towards the guidelines.

Choose activities appropriate to your ability (see examples on page 13). You may need to talk to your doctor about what sort of activity you are able to do.





Guidelines for losing weight and keeping it off

Adults who are overweight or obese gain similar health benefits from physical activity as people with a healthy body weight. Even when you do not lose weight, you will gain health benefits from being more active (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008).

You will gain even more benefits if you lose weight as well as increase your activity levels. To achieve and maintain a healthy weight you may need to change your diet as well as increase activity. To lose weight you need to use up more energy on activity than you get from food. To maintain your weight you need to have a balance between the amount of energy you get from food and use on activity.

To maintain a healthy weight

To avoid gaining weight, you need to use at least 350 calories per day in physical activity, as well as the energy you use in everyday tasks. This means about 60 minutes of brisk walking or 30 minutes of jogging per day.

If you have lost a significant amount of weight, you may need to do 60 – 90 minutes of moderate activity per day to keep the weight off (UK Department of Health, 2004).

To lose weight

To lose weight, you need to do more physical activity than the recommendations for adults at a healthy weight. How much activity you need to do can vary depending on a number of factors, including how much weight you need to lose. In general, you need to do about one third more activity than the amount recommended by the adult guidelines. This amounts to brisk walking for at least 60 – 75 minutes per day.

If you have a very high Body Mass Index (BMI) – 30.0 or above, or you are extremely inactive, start with bouts of 10 minutes or less. Gradually increase the duration, and then the intensity of your activity until you reach the adult guidelines (see page 13).



Progressing your physical activity (adults)

To progress your physical activity, whatever your age or ability, you must set yourself realistic and achievable goals related to your current level of activity. You can count all physical activity that lasts 10 minutes or more towards the guidelines.

If you do not take part in physical activity

- Start off with a few minutes of activity each day, for example a 5 – 10 minute walk.
- Gradually increase to 30 minutes of moderate activity on 1 – 2 days a week, as well as a 10 minute walk every other day.
- Over a few weeks increase the number of days until you reach at least 30 minutes moderate activity on five days of the week.

If you are active, but at less than the recommended levels

- Get active more often and for longer until you reach a regular pattern of at least 30 minutes moderate activity (or a mix of moderate and vigorous activity) on five days of the week.

If you are active at the minimum recommended levels

- Continue to increase the duration and intensity of your activity. Aim for the milestone of 60 minutes moderate activity on five days a week or a mix of moderate and vigorous activity.

Promoting the guidelines





Promoting the guidelines

There are major benefits to health and the economy of getting more people more active. Everyone – children, young people, adults, older people and people with disabilities – needs to be encouraged and supported to **be active every day in as many ways as they can.**

If you have the opportunity to promote physical activity, make sure that key messages on physical activity are part of all your communication. This includes when you talk to people, in group activities or through leaflets, booklets, posters, TV, radio, websites or other media.

Key messages

People are most likely to respond to messages that:

- stress the benefits of physical activity;
- promote self belief;
- promote social support; or
- suggest ways to fit physical activity into daily life.

Stress the benefits of physical activity

- Regular physical activity will improve your health and well-being as well as reduce the risk of developing chronic illness.
- The health benefits of physical activity increase as your level of activity increases.
- Some physical activity is better than none. The more you do, the more benefits you gain.
- Be active for reasons that are important to you – personalise the benefits of regular physical activity.
- Choose physical activities that you enjoy to maximise your chances of staying active.

Promote self-belief

Self-belief is the confidence that you can be physically active. It is an important factor in motivating people to be active. Choose role models that you or your group can relate to, ideally role models of similar ability.

- Physical activity – who says it has to be hard?
- “If I can do it, you can too.”
- Choose an activity you enjoy, there are plenty of options.
- Start slowly and set goals to increase your chance of success.
- Keep an activity diary, or use a pedometer and aim to increase the number of steps you take each day.



Promote social support

Having support from your family and friends makes it easier to be active. Physical activity is fun and enjoyable.

- It's more fun to walk, cycle or run with a friend.
- There are many people and organisations near you that offer opportunities and support to help you be more active.
- If you are trying to change your behaviour – don't do it alone. Let your friends and family know that being more active is important to you and ask them to support or even to join you.
- Getting active as a family is a great way to encourage children to build good activity habits for life.
- Give children active gifts such as toys and equipment that encourage physical activity.

How to fit physical activity into everyday life

- You don't have to do it all at once – build up 30 minutes by being active for at least 10 minutes a number of times a day.
- For children all activity, no matter how short, counts towards their 60 minutes.
- Fun and enjoyment is important.
- Be active your way!

Some examples of activities include:

- Vacuum the house from top to bottom with effort – use the stairs as often as possible.
- Vigorously wash the windows inside and out.
- Walk to the bus or train.
- Go out for a walk, run or cycle before work, or during your lunch break.
- Meet friends for a walk, run or cycle on a weekend morning.
- Park further away from where you intend to go, and walk the last part.
- Take the stairs instead of the escalator or the lift.
- Work in the garden.
- Join an exercise or circuit training class.
- Play active games with your children.
- Organise a game of football, hockey or tennis with friends.
- Walk or play with pets.
- Play active computer games.

The evidence is that men and women favour different types of activity. Men are more inclined to take part in vigorous and team activities, whereas more women take part in moderate and individual activities. Take this into account when planning activities.



Support and training to promote physical activity

You can get information, training and support to promote physical activity from:

Health promotion departments – your local HSE Health Promotion Department provides information and training on promoting health and well-being including physical activity. Visit www.healthpromotion.ie or contact HSE Infoline on 1850 24 1850 for details of your local health promotion department.

Local sports partnerships are an initiative of the Irish Sports Council. They promote opportunities for physical activity and sport for all at local level. Visit www.irishsportsCouncil.ie for details of your local sports partnership.

Irish Heart Foundation is the national heart charity that runs campaigns on physical activity and provides information on being active for heart health. Slí na Sláinte walking routes located throughout the country are an initiative of the Irish Heart Foundation. Visit www.irishheart.ie for more information.

National governing bodies of sports have training programmes for coaches and volunteers. Some of the national bodies have also adapted programmes for people with disabilities. As well as the mainstream sports there are also specific sports bodies such as Cerebral Palsy Sport Ireland, Irish Blind Sports, Irish Wheelchair Association Sport, Irish Deaf Sports Association, Special Olympics Ireland and the Paralympic Council of Ireland. For more details visit www.irishsportsCouncil.ie

The CARA Adapted Physical Activity Centre at the Institute of Technology in Tralee, Co. Kerry facilitates, co-ordinates and advocates for the inclusion of people with disabilities in physical activity, sport and physical education. More information at www.caraapacentre.ie



Glossary of relevant terms

BMI – Body Mass Index is worked out from your weight and height. To calculate your BMI simply multiply your height in metres by itself, then divide your weight in kilograms by that number: $BMI = \text{weight} \times \text{height}^2$. BMI is used to indicate healthy weight, overweight and obesity.

Healthy weight: BMI 18.5 – 24.9

Overweight: BMI 25.0 – 29.9

Obese: BMI 30.0 – 34.9

If you are very muscular BMI may not be accurate and you would need to use a different method to assess your health risk. For children and young people (up to 20 years of age) assessment of BMI depends on their age and sex and the above formula should not be used.

Another indicator of health risk is waist measurement. Waist measurement is used to indicate risk of chronic illness such as heart disease and diabetes.

Healthy:	Men	less than 94 cms (37 inches)
	Women	less than 80 cms (32 inches)
Increased risk:	Men	94 – 101.9 cms (37 – 40 inches)
	Women	80 – 87.9 cms (32 – 35 inches)
High risk:	Men	greater than 102 cm (40 inches)
	Women	greater than 89 cms (35 inches)

For an easy to use guide to calculating your BMI and waist measurement visit www.weigh2live.eu.

Physical activity is “any force exerted by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure above resting level” (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008). This means that virtually all types of physical activity count, including walking or cycling, dance, traditional games and pastimes, gardening and housework, as well as sport or deliberate exercise. Sport and exercise are particular types of physical activity. Sport usually involves some form of competition, and exercise is usually done to improve fitness and health.

Aerobic physical activity means the body’s large muscles move in a rhythmic way for a sustained period of time. This improves your cardio-respiratory fitness (heart and lungs). Aerobic activity is also called **endurance activity**. Examples include walking, running, swimming and cycling.

Progression means once you reach a certain fitness level, you progress to a higher level of physical activity by continuing to push yourself and change your routine. Small, progressive changes help your body adapt to the additional stress while minimising your risk of injury. If you keep active but do not progress to higher levels of activity, you will stay at your current level of fitness.



Overload is the stress placed on your body when you are more physically active than usual. You achieve overload by increasing the **frequency**, **duration** and **intensity** of your activity – pushing yourself harder, for longer, more often.

Intensity is the amount of effort you make, and can vary depending on the activity. It means how much work you are doing or how much you have to push yourself to perform an activity or exercise.

Intensity can be measured in:

absolute terms – such as speed, such as walking at 3 miles an hour, jogging at 6 miles an hour, or the body's response to the intensity, for example heart rate; or

relative terms – such as the percent of your maximum heart rate, or how hard you feel you are exercising, for example on a scale of 0 to 10.

Duration is the length of time you are doing an activity, usually expressed in minutes.

Frequency is the number of times you perform an exercise or activity, expressed in sessions, episodes or bouts per week.

Specificity means that the benefits of physical activity are specific to the body systems that are doing the work. For example, aerobic physical activity largely benefits your cardiovascular system (heart and lungs).

Moderate intensity means activity that raises your heartbeat and leaves you feeling warm and slightly out of breath. It increases the body's metabolism to 3 – 6 times the resting level (also called metabolic equivalents or METs). For most inactive people, a brisk walk is moderate intensity. More active and fit people need to fast walk or slow jog to achieve this intensity. Most physical activity recommendations focus on moderate intensity to include a broad range of activities.

Vigorous intensity means activity that causes you to work up a sweat and become out of breath. This usually involves sport or exercise such as running or fast cycling. Vigorous activities raise the metabolism to at least six times its resting level (6 METs).

A **kilocalorie (kcal)** is a unit of energy. It is the same as a calorie. The energy you get from food and the energy you use in physical activity can be expressed in calories.

Sedentary means that your lifestyle is not very active. This happens if you sit most of the time, at work and at home. Sedentary activities include computer work and driving. You can balance these by having more active leisure time.

Key documents consulted in drawing up these guidelines

Australian Government Department of Health and Aging. **National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults.** Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1999

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Parties consulted when drawing up these guidelines

Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management Ireland (ILAM Ireland)

National Council for Exercise and Fitness (NCEF)

Irish Pharmaceutical Union (IPU)

HSE Occupational Health Nurses

Institute of Community Health Nursing

Irish Practice Nurses Association

Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP)

Age and Opportunity

National Council on Ageing and Older People

Irish Cancer Society

Health and Safety Authority

Diabetes Federation of Ireland

Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute (INDI)

Irish Council of Chartered Physiotherapists

Irish Osteoporosis Society

National Disability Authority

Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)

Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI)

Physical Activity Health Promotion Officers, HSE

HSE Health Promotion – Social Marketing, Communications and Advocacy

National Men's Health Policy

Safefood

Community Nutrition and Dietetic Services HSE West

CARA Centre, Institute of Technology, Tralee

Academics across all Irish universities and Institutes of Technology

Professor Adrian Bauman, University of Sydney; Assistant Professor Sam Zizzi, West Virginia University; Professor Claudio Nigg, University of Hawaii; Professor Nanette Mutrie, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow



Where to get more information on being active

Name	Telephone	Web address
HSE Health Promotion	1850 24 1850 for contact details of local services	www.healthpromotion.ie
Irish Sports Council	01 860 8800	www.irishsportsCouncil.ie
Irish Heart Foundation	01 668 5001	www.irishheart.ie
Special Olympics Ireland	01 882 3972	www.specialolympics.ie
Paralympic Council of Ireland	01 625 1175	www.pcireland.ie
National Council for Ageing and Older People	01 674 3299	www.ncaop.ie
People with Disabilities Ireland	01 872 1744	www.pwdi.ie
Age and Opportunity	01 805 7733	www.olderinireland.ie
National Youth Council of Ireland	01 478 4122	www.youth.ie
CARA – adapted physical activity centre	066 714 5646	www.caraapacentre.ie
Irish Wheelchair Association	01 818 6400	www.iwa.ie
Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute	01 280 4839	www.indi.ie
Irish Society for Chartered Physiotherapists	01 402 2148	www.iscp.ie

Irish websites

www.getirelandactive.ie	For information on the national physical activity guidelines
www.littlesteps.eu	Health Service Executive and SafeFood consumer information site
www.communitygames.ie	For information on local community games activities and groups
www.womeninsport.ie	Irish Sports Council site for women
www.walkireland.ie	Lists trails and walks in Ireland
www.instituteofsport.ie	Irish Sports Council site for high performance in sport
www.coachingireland.com	Information on coaching in Ireland
www.olderinireland.ie	Information on Go for life – physical activity programme for older people
www.irishsports.ie	Federation of Irish sports website
www.pcireland.ie	Paralympic council of Ireland website



Local Sports Partnerships websites

www.carlowsports.ie	County Carlow
www.cavansportspartnership.ie	County Cavan
www.claresportspartnership.ie	County Clare
www.corkcity.ie	Cork City
www.cclsp.com	County Cork
www.activedonegal.com	County Donegal
www.dlrcoco.ie/sports	Dun Laoghaire and Rathdown
www.fingalsportspartnership.ie	Fingal
www.galwaycity.ie	Galway City
www.galwaycoco.ie	County Galway
www.kerryisp.ie	County Kerry
www.kildaresp.ie	County Kildare
www.laoissports.ie	County Laois
www.cllsp.ie	County Limerick
www.leitrimcoco.ie	County Leitrim
www.limerickcitysports.ie	Limerick City
www.longfordcoco.ie	County Longford
www.louthisp.ie	County Louth
www.mayosports.ie	County Mayo
www.meathlocalsportspartnership.ie	County Meath
www.monaghansports.ie	County Monaghan
www.ntsp.ie	North Tipperary
www.offalysports.ie	County Offaly
www.rosactive.org	County Roscommon
www.sligosportandrecreation.ie	County Sligo
www.sdcsp.ie	South Dublin
www.stsp.ie	South Tipperary
www.waterfordsportspartnership.ie	County Waterford
www.westmeathsports.ie	County Westmeath
www.wexford.ie	County Wexford



Other websites

www.bhfactive.org.eu	British Heart Foundation National Centre, Physical activity and health
www.acsm.org	American College of Sports Medicine
www.nice.org	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
www.sparcoll.org.uk	Scottish Physical Activity Research Collaboration
www.sportengland.org	Sport England
www.wuro.who.int/hepa	European Network for the promotion of Health-enhancing Physical Activity
www.ipenproject.org	International Physical Activity and the Environment Network
www.activeplaces.com	Sport England active places
www.americanheart.org	American Heart Association
www.takelifeon.co.uk	Take life one step at a time
www.pathsforall.co.uk	Paths for all
www.whi.org	Womens Health Initiative
www.cdc.gov	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.healthyschools.gov.uk	Healthy schools
www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk	Sustrans
www.youthsporttrust.org	Youth Sport Trust
www.ohsu.edu/healthyageing	Centre for Health Aging
www.icaa.cc	International Council on Active Aging
www.isapa.org	International Society for Aging and Physical Activity
www.aso.org.uk	Association for the study of Obesity



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