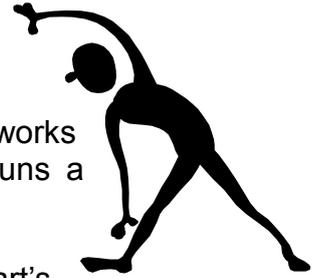


Fitness



What are the benefits of exercise and keeping fit?

- Exercise is good for the heart. The heart is a muscle which works more efficiently if we exercise. Without exercise a person runs a greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease
- Over a period of months regular exercise will lower the heart's resting rate and this increases your chances of living longer
- Exercise is good for the circulation. As we get older our blood vessels lose their elasticity and this in turn causes blood pressure to rise. Exercise helps to lower this pressure
- Exercise can help keep weight down. An increase in weight puts increased stress on your joints which can then lead to mobility problems
- If your weight increases your body's sensitivity to insulin becomes reduced and this can lead to Type 2 Diabetes. This in turn can lead to damage to the eyes and extremities
- Exercise helps your breathing as your lung capacity will improve
- The risk of having a stroke can be reduced by as much as 20% by doing regular exercise
- Lack of exercise leads to increased cholesterol levels. Although we need cholesterol for the cells to work, high levels of what is referred to as 'bad cholesterol' can lead to an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease. A brisk 15 – 20 minute walk a day is enough to help bring cholesterol levels down. This is also good for the bones as it lowers the risks of developing Osteoporosis and possibly fracturing a bone if you fall
- As we get older our muscles lose mass and strength in a condition known as Sarcopenia (from the Greek words *sarx* meaning flesh and *penia* meaning loss). This loss is about 1 – 2% a year from about the age of 50 and increases the risk of having a fall
- Exercise increases the release of endorphins. As your endorphin levels rise you begin to feel good. Thus exercise is good for your mental health as well as your physical
- Some studies have shown that regular exercise can reduce the incidence of certain cancers, for example of the breast and colon, by as much as 20 -30%. However it is accepted that regular exercise is probably one of many factors, such as eating a healthy diet, that contribute to reducing the risk of developing cancer

What exercise and how much should we do?

- Walking at a moderate pace (so you are slightly out of breath) has been shown to be beneficial. This exercises the large muscles and increases the heart rate. The recommended amount is 30 - 60 minutes, 3 - 6 times a week. The maximum target heart rate is (220 minus your age) beats per minute. Moderate walking for half an hour should take you to $\frac{3}{4}$ of this maximum target rate. Thus a person aged 50 would have a maximum target heart rate of 170 and moderate walking for 30 minutes should get them to between 100 and 128 beats per minute. As you get fitter it becomes harder to get your heart rate up as it is working more efficiently
- Jogging can be beneficial for the cardiovascular system but is not necessarily good for your joints. The amount of jogging undertaken should be built up gradually
- Fitness equipment can be useful. It is a good idea to use this with someone else around as it is important to keep your back straight, to hold your tummy in and to watch your joints as you use the equipment. The recommended amount of exercise using outdoor equipment (available in both Chalgrove and Watlington) is 20 minutes twice a week at 40% of your target heart rate
- Resistance training (using dumbbells, weight machines etc) can help build muscles but the amount of exercise undertaken and technique are important so it is always advisable to get some expert advice before embarking on this
- Wearing a pedometer can be helpful as it can remind you that you haven't met your target for the day. The recommended target is 10,000 steps a day which is equivalent to walking about 5 miles. A person weighing 150lb should burn about 80 calories per mile – exercise is only part of a weight-loss strategy
- Swimming is a very good form of exercise although there is no advantage to the bones and it can have the disadvantage of making you feel hungry afterwards
- Extreme exercise – this is short bouts of very intensive exercise where you follow a pattern of: Exercise - stop - rest - repeat. During intensive exercise the body works in an anaerobic mode, lactic acid builds up and calories are burned more efficiently than when you are doing moderate exercise. However this type of exercise should not be undertaken without consulting your GP as it can be risky, particularly if you have a pre-existing condition such as high blood pressure

The best advice is to undertake regular moderate exercise and to seek both medical and professional advice before embarking on any form of fitness programme; particularly if it is intense. Individuals vary enormously in the amount and type of exercise they can or should undertake. There are lots of fitness groups and activities around to get you going – and to keep you going - and if you can't find one that's suitable for you, why not start up one of your own?