

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

planning policy, makes other broader contributions, increasing social inter-action throughout the life course, providing recreational enjoyment, and reducing violence, urban traffic congestion and pollution.

Physical activity also has economic benefits, especially in terms of reduced health care costs, increased productivity, and healthier physical and social environments. Data from developed countries indicate that the direct costs of inactivity are enormous. The costs associated with inactivity and obesity accounted for some 9.4% of the national USA health expenditure in 1995. Physically active individuals in the USA save an estimated \$500 per year in health care costs according to 1998 data. Inactivity alone may have contributed as much as \$75 billion to US medical costs in the year 2000. In Canada, physical inactivity accounts for about 6% of total health care costs.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

While different amounts are needed for various outcomes, the optimal combination of type, frequency and intensity for different populations is not known. There is, however, clear consensus in recommending at least 30 minutes daily of moderate intensity activity. Increased benefits come from doing more, especially more vigorous activities, and these are highly recommended for youth to support healthy bones and muscles. Physical activity does not necessarily mean running a strenuous marathon or playing competitive sports. Rather, for many people, it is about walking the children to school, or taking a brisk stroll in the park. It means taking the stairs, instead of the elevator, or getting off the bus two stops early.

Currently 60% of the world's population is estimated to not get enough physical activity to achieve even this modest recommendation, with adults in developed countries most likely to be inactive. Patterns of physical activity acquired during childhood and adolescence are more likely to be maintained throughout the life span, providing the basis for active and healthy life. Unhealthy lifestyles - including sedentary behaviour, poor diet and substance abuse, adopted at a young age, are likely to persist. Physical activity is not merely about individual behaviour. Multi-sectoral policies and initiatives are needed to create environments that help people to be physically active. These should be:

- Population-based collective actions, involving various stakeholders, including public and private sector groups and NGOs.
- These should involve multiple sectors - especially health, sport, education, transport and culture and recreation ministries, as well as urban planners and local governments/municipalities.

- They should be culturally relevant and partnership-based.
- They should promote physical activity in all life settings.
- They should make use of major sport, health and cultural events.

ACTION IS UNDERWAY

- The WHO's development of a Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health reflects Member States' increasing recognition that physical activity must be considered alongside diet, in combating the growing chronic disease burden.
- WHO dedicated World No Tobacco Day 2002 to "Tobacco Free Sports: Play it Clean".
- WHO and other agencies are actively collaborating with sports bodies in programmes such as Sports for All, aimed at increasing access to sport across population groups.
- A special focus is being placed upon partnership-based action to promote physical activity and sport among both boys and girls, in and out of schools.



"MOVE FOR HEALTH"

Following the successful *World Health Day 2002*, Member States have agreed to celebrate "Move for Health" Day annually to promote physical activity as essential for health and well-being. *Move for Health Day* will be linked to a larger ongoing process to promote physical activity worldwide throughout the year in the context of an integrated approach to the prevention of chronic diseases, health promotion and socio-economic development. This aims to increase regular physical activity practices in the population amongst men and women of all ages and conditions, in all domains (leisure, transport, work) and settings (school, community, home and workplace).

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