

# Health-Enhancing Physical Activity in older Adults

## Recommendations for Switzerland



### Aim of recommendations

The recommendations below are specifications for developing and assessing movement-oriented, health-enhancing activities. They do not constitute direct instructions for adopting, structuring and maintaining a personal physical activity regime. For additional information, please refer to the section entitled «Implementing the recommendations».

### Basic recommendations for health-enhancing physical activity

Physical activity and sport are important for health and fitness in all age groups. For individuals who are physically inactive, any step towards greater physical activity is important and also has direct immediate benefits. Extended periods of sitting down need to be punctuated more frequently by periods of physical activity.

Regular physical activity is important for older adults because it helps to increase their quality of life and prevents them from becoming dependent on and requiring assistance from other people (or at least delays the time when this will be the case). Nevertheless, differences from person to person can be very substantial. Older adults of more robust health are more or less able to follow the recommendations that apply to younger adults. Older adults who are frail or dependent on other people often have more than one ailment and suffer from functional impairments and reduced vitality. It is for these people that the recommendations

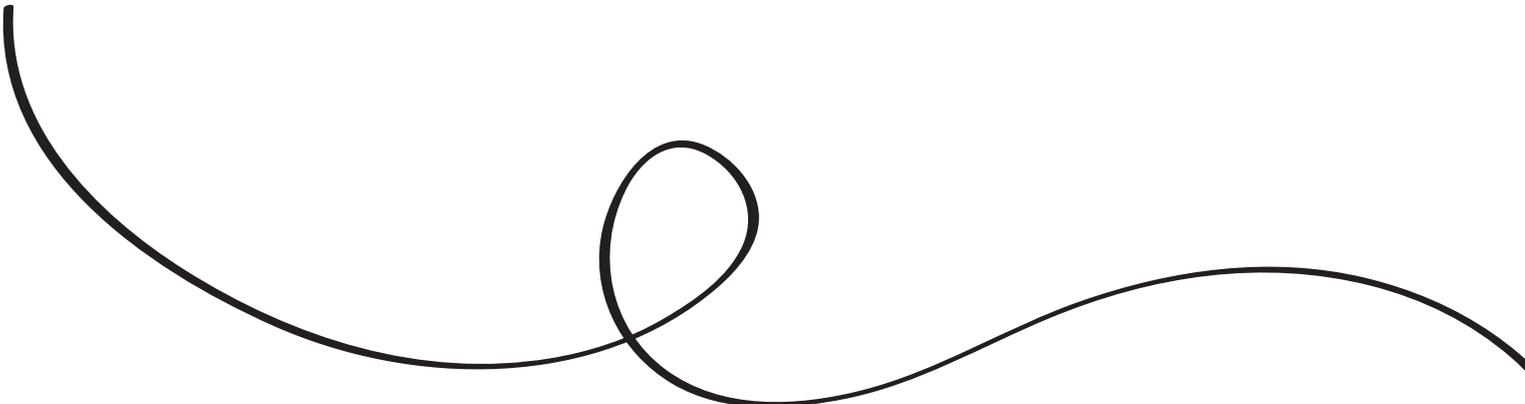
need adjusting. Basic recommendations for men and women of robust health who are past retirement age:

- At least two and a half hours per week of physical activity in the form of routine activities or moderate-intensity sport.
- Or one and a quarter hours per week of high-intensity sport or physical activity.
- Combinations of physical activity of varying intensity are also possible – 10 minutes of high-intensity physical activity result in the same health benefits as 20 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity.

A moderate intensity level relates to physical activities in which the individual gets a little out of breath but does not necessarily break sweat. Brisk walking, cycling, snow-shovelling and gardening are examples of moderate-intensity physical exertion, as are many other leisure, sports and routine day-to-day activities.

A high intensity level relates to activities that cause people to break sweat and accelerate their breathing. Such activities include highly aerobic sports that work large muscle groups – such as running, vigorous cycling, swimming or cross-country skiing – as well as training on exercise machines. It is possible and practical to combine as well as vary different activities.

Ideally, physical activity should be spread over a number of days during the week. Every period of physical activity lasting at least 10 minutes can be added up over the course of the day. There are various ways in which to achieve the basic recommended regime. For example:

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- Half an hour of moderate-intensity physical activity on five days respectively per week.
  - Half an hour of moderate-intensity physical activity on three days plus half an hour of high-intensity physical activity on one day per week.

Frail and dependent older adults should also engage in physical activity as much as possible, even if they are no longer able to complete the basic recommended regime on account of their impairments.

## Additional recommendations

The key step in improving your health is that of making the transition from physical inactivity to regular physical activity in accordance with the basic recommendations. Men and women who already perform the basic recommended regime can do even more for their health, well-being and fitness by taking up a targeted programme of training that focuses on power, balance, flexibility and endurance.

When growing old, strength training is particularly important in terms of staying fit and maintaining personal independence. It helps to maintain muscle mass. Priority should be on strengthening the torso and leg muscles, as well as the shoulder-arm region. Together with exercises to improve balance, strength training for the torso and leg muscles is important for preventing the type of falls that can have serious consequences for people of advanced age. Strength and balance training should be performed at least three times a week, ideally through gymnastic or stretching exercises to improve flexibility. Higher-intensity activities generally result in additional health benefits. The existing recommendations for endurance and cardiorespiratory fitness training, comprising at least three high-intensity training sessions per week, are also relevant in this regard.

## The varied benefits of physical activity and sport

In general, sporting activities that exceed the aforementioned recommendations are additionally beneficial to health. However, such extra benefits become less and less pronounced and hardly increase at all once the amount of physical activity corresponds, for example, to five hours of swimming per week (see also dose-response curve).

An even greater volume of training does not have an adverse impact on health. However, the higher the training workload becomes, the more important it is to achieve a targeted and balanced training, recovery and nutrition regime and to combine competition with training in a judicious manner so as to prevent physical strain.

Physical/sporting activities that are systematically planned and coordinated can have a positive effect on our psychological well-being. They can also help to regulate stress, increase self-esteem and facilitate the social integration of individuals and a wide variety of population groups. Sport and physical activity can also be used in the treatment and rehabilitation of a whole series of illnesses and physical impairments.

Older adults with health problems or disabilities also benefit from regular physical activity. Medical assessments and individual adjustments to physical activity recommendations regarding the type and intensity of activity, in consultation with experts, may be advisable in this regard.

## Implementing the recommendations

Physical activity recommendations that are geared directly to individuals or specific population groups should be based on the recommendations defined in this document, but their content and form may be adapted to the relevant target group. They should be realistic and user friendly and focus on tackling hindrances and motivational issues.

Making lasting changes to physical activity habits is often a long process that typically comprises various stages and also involves setbacks. The complexity of this process, the significance of various factors on a behavioural and relationship level, and the particular characteristics of respective target groups must be taken into account when developing models to promote health through physical activity and sport.

Physical activity promotion per se also helps to prevent accidents among older adults. Practical experience of demanding sports activities should be acquired under professional supervision. Where appropriate, such activities should have structures in place to prevent accidents.

## Summary of recommendations for older adults

- For individuals who are physically inactive, any step towards greater physical activity is important and also has direct immediate health benefits. Extended periods of sitting down need to be punctuated more frequently by periods of physical activity.
- It is recommended that men and women of robust health who are past retirement age engage in two and a half hours per week of physical activity in the form of routine activities or moderate-intensity sport. This basic recommended regime can also be achieved through one and a quarter hours per week of high-intensity sport or physical activity, or a combination of moderate and high-intensity physical activity.
- Physical activity promotion per se also helps to prevent accidents among older adults. Older people should engage in physical activity as much as possible, even if they are no longer able to complete the basic recommended regime. Adjustments to the physical activity recommendations are of particular importance in the case of older adults who are frail or dependent on other people.
- These basic recommendations have a significant and varied positive impact on health and quality of life. Ideally, physical activity should be spread over a number of days during the week. Every period of physical activity lasting at least 10 minutes can be added up over the course of the day.
- Additional power, balance, flexibility and endurance training can help those who are already physically active to enhance their health, well-being, fitness and independence even further.
- Additional sporting activities provide extra health benefits, albeit to progressively smaller degrees (see dose-response curve).



## OLDER ADULTS



IDEALLY SPREAD OVER A NUMBER OF DAYS DURING THE WEEK

MODERATE INTENSITY



HIGH INTENSITY

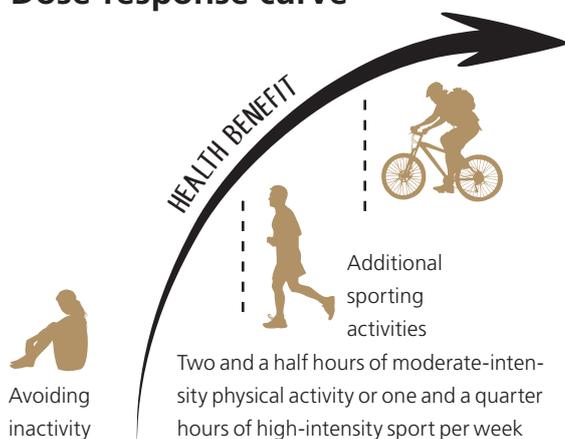


Additional benefits through further training in relation to:

- POWER
- BALANCE
- FLEXIBILITY
- ENDURANCE



## Dose-response curve



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