

# Health and well-being -

## making physical activity a habit

### **I've started getting into physical activity, how should I continue?**

- ☐ Which type of physical activity feels right for you? Walking, jogging, cycling, aerobics, dancing, swimming or gym workouts...
- ☐ Do you prefer being physically active alone or in a group?
- ☐ What feels like the right level of effort? Do you want to push yourself hard or take it easier?
- ☐ Do you prefer being physically active for your own enjoyment, or would you like to set goals for your physical activity?



---

---

### **I've exercised before, how should I start again after a break?**

- ☐ Was the break a long one – weeks or even years?
- ☐ How have you changed? Do your old types of activity still work for you, or do you know what should be changed?
- ☐ What are you able to do with your current fitness level?
- ☐ What are your goals? Better results, improved fitness, feeling refreshed, well-being, or better health?



---

---

## Regularity

You gain long-term benefits from physical activity that you do often enough and regularly. Do what feels right for you. Choose activities that are feasible for you.

## Variety

Mixing different types of physical activity build endurance, muscle strength, flexibility and balance. That's why it's good to be physically active in more than one way each week. For example, do a few workout moves and stretch after a walk or playing a ball game.

## The right level of exertion

You'll find the right level of exertion by learning to listen to your body. The scale below can help you find the right level.

### What does exertion feel like?

|    |                  |
|----|------------------|
| 6  |                  |
| 7  | very, very light |
| 8  |                  |
| 9  | very light       |
| 10 |                  |
| 11 | fairly light     |
| 12 |                  |
| 13 | somewhat hard    |
| 14 |                  |
| 15 | hard             |
| 16 |                  |
| 17 | very hard        |
| 18 |                  |
| 19 | very, very hard  |
| 20 |                  |

The rating of perceived exertion (RPE) scale provides information about the perceived intensity of physical activity. A person rates the intensity of physical activity on a scale from 6 to 20. A rating of 6 means no exertion at all, while 20 means the maximal exertion imaginable.

On the scale, light endurance-type physical activity corresponds to 9–11, moderate activity to 12–13 and vigorous activity to 14–17 (ACSM 2025).

The RPE scale was originally developed by Borg (1970).

There are several versions of the scale, and the Finnish version is presented, for example, in the book *Fyysisen kunnon mittaaminen* (Keskinen et al. 2018).

**What to do?**

Consider what you could do regularly. It's better to be physically active regularly, like twice a week, than to do a lot now and then. Remember variety.

**When?**

Create a weekly schedule. Which days of the week and times are most suitable for you?

**How?**

What could make it easier to start activity? Bring a friend, or join an exercise group? Would tracking steps or heart rate motivate you? What are you aiming for??

Moderate physical activity, like brisk walking, at least 2 hours and 30 minutes per week. Exertion is then at a level of 12–15 on the previous page's scale. You can also add up the time from short bouts of physical activity, of a few minutes each.

Alternatively, you can do vigorous physical activity like jogging. Then shorter time, at least 1 hour 15 minutes per week, is enough. On the scale, exertion is then at least 14.

Also do muscle strengthening activities at least twice a week. Do 8–10 different exercises for your main muscle groups. Repeat each exercise about 10 times until your muscles feel tired.

You can use a calendar or the [Weekly Physical Activity Schedule](#) to help you create your weekly plan. You can keep track of the sessions you've completed to see if you're sticking to your plan. If planning feels difficult, contact a fitness instructor or a physiotherapist.

## Plan ahead

Things happen that can prevent you from following your plan.

Plan ahead for what you will do when..

- you're in a hurry
- you feel tired
- the weather is bad
- you go on a trip
- childcare arrangements don't work out.

## Symptoms and illnesses

If you have illnesses or ongoing symptoms, ask your doctor about suitable activities, potential limitations, and how medicine may affect your activity.

If you catch a cold or suddenly fall ill, take a break from physical activity.

## Safety

Remember to warm up at the beginning of your workout and cool-down at the end.

Make sure that your skills are on sufficient level and your equipment is in good condition. In familiar activities, you can safely increase the intensity. New activities take time to learn and may need guidance.

## Long-term regular physical activity

- refreshes and energizes
- helps you sleep well
- helps with weight management
- reduces the risk of heart and vascular diseases
- increases the levels of HDL cholesterol (the 'good' cholesterol) in the blood.
- decreases blood pressure.
- reduces the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
- may slow down bone loss as you age.
- protects against breast and colon cancer.