

## **Introduction**

Exercise and fitness are part of looking good, feeling good and being healthy.

Our bodies are the same as those of our hunter-gatherer ancestors of thousands of years ago. Changes in lifestyle and advances in technology mean exercise is no longer a part of most of our lives. Our bodies are built for exercise, but the need to exercise has been all but eliminated from our way of life.

There are two ways to fit exercise into our lives. The first is by planning specific exercise sessions into our daily routines e.g. cycling, running, swimming and other sports. The second is by building activities into our lives to increase physical demands on our bodies e.g. gardening, walking to school etc.

Exercise must become habitual rather than occasional. Some days you will feel full of energy, on other days you simply may not be in the mood. It is essential that you maintain the exercise habit. Plan ahead and work out when you can find the time to exercise. This may be early in the morning, over your lunch break, or in the early evening.

Remember that getting fit usually requires more effort than keeping fit. Once a certain level of fitness has been reached, less time and effort are generally required to stay at that level.

The following activities have all been shown to produce benefits—when performed regularly.

## **Walking**

Research has shown that brisk walking four or five times a week for up to 45 minutes can result in major improvements in health and fitness. These include reduced blood pressure, reduced cholesterol levels and weight loss.

## **Stair Climbing**

How many times do we choose to use a lift or escalator when stairs are also available? Next time you're faced with the choice, go for the healthy option. Underground stations, department stores and office buildings all provide a great opportunity to avoid the lift queues by taking flight up the stairs.

## **Gardening**

The garden is an excellent place for some physical activity, for example: chopping wood, cutting the grass or pulling up weeds. A couple of hours spent working in the garden is a great way of developing health and fitness, burning up the calories and losing weight. :

## **Housework**

Doing housework is a much under-rated method of exercising for men and women. Pushing the vacuum cleaner, dusting and polishing all increase heart rate and consume energy, leading to positive benefits for health and fitness.

## **Cycling**

Cycling is great exercise that can easily become part of your lifestyle. Whenever possible, especially on short trips, cycle instead of going by car or bus. Do not forget to wear a safety helmet. Two of the countries with the lowest rates of mortality for heart attacks and strokes are the Netherlands and China, where the number of bicycles per person is higher than in any other country.