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THE FIT FACTOR

LIFESTYLE CHANGE

Consistent everyday activity is key to our mental health. This is especially important at the moment because lockdown has certainly added to this.

FITNESS TIP

Fitness does not have to be a regime. Dancing can be as beneficial as going to the gym, and every day activity such as walking or cycling to the shops or to work can be a great way to get the heart pumping.

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THIS last year has surely taught us that we need to be more proactive about our health so that we are more resilient to disease and outbreaks of viruses that can be life-threatening.

It's easy to speculate how things may turn out but there is no arguing with the stats and data concerning our nation's health.

Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities.

Being inactive here in the UK is making us ill and can lead to premature death. The definition of 'inactive' is being active for less than 30 minutes per week.

Physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. People who have a physically active lifestyle have a 20-35% lower risk of cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease and stroke compared to those who have a sedentary lifestyle. Regular physical activity is also associated with a reduced risk of diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis and colon/breast cancer and with

improved mental health.

One in two women and a third of men in England are damaging their health through a lack of physical activity and costs the UK an estimated £7.4bn a year. If current trends continue, the increasing costs of health and social care will destabilise public services and take a toll on quality of life for individuals and communities

There are many social, individual and emotional reasons to promote more physical activity. Being active plays a key role in brain development in early childhood and is also good for longer-term educational attainment, also increased energy levels boosts workplace productivity and reduces sickness absence. An active population can even reduce levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

In the UK a huge 33% of men and 45% of women are not active enough for good health.

According to the World Health Organisation, the UK stacks up poorly compared to other nations in terms of inactivity even compared

to the USA which is well known for having huge problems with obesity: Holland 18.2%; Germany 28%; France 32.5%; Finland 37.8%; Australia 37.9%; USA 40.5%; UK 63.3%

90% of those in the UK with diabetes have Type 2 - this type is associated with lifestyle and is entirely preventable.

Persuading inactive people to become more active could prevent one in 10 cases of stroke and heart disease in the UK.

One in eight women in the UK are at risk of developing breast cancer at some point in their lives. Being active every day can reduce that risk by up to 20% and also improve the lives of those living with cancer.

Dementia affects 800,000 people in the UK. Staying active can reduce the risk of vascular dementia and also have a positive impact on non-vascular dementia.

Depression is increasing in all age groups. People who are inactive have three times the rate of moderate to severe depression of active people. Being active is central to our mental health. This is especially

important now because lockdown has certainly added to this.

Physical activity does not need to be strenuous to be effective. Thirty minutes a day of moderate aerobic activity can be a brisk walk, a swim, or even a spell of gardening. Each 10-minute bout that gets the heart rate up has a health benefit. Although sport can be part of the picture, activity can also be more informal. Fitness does not have to be a 'regime'. Dancing can be as beneficial as going to the gym, and everyday activity such as walking or cycling to the shops or to work can be a great way to get the heart pumping.

From the age of 30, an adult's muscle and bone mass peaks and begins to decline slowly. Performing simple resistance-type activity - such as press-ups or light lifting - twice a week improves muscle strength and stability. It also helps prevent musculoskeletal disease.

New evidence from neuroscience suggests that being physically active also supports further brain development during adulthood. We need to

revise our physical literacy as we get older, changing our expectations of what we can do so that we have the confidence to do it. That will help maintain mental agility, wellbeing and independence.

So, what do the guidelines tell us we should do?

■ Adults should aim to be active daily. Over a week, activity should add up to at least 150 minutes (2½ hours) of moderate intensity activity in bouts of 10 minutes or more - one way to approach this is to do 30 minutes on at least five days a week.

■ Alternatively, comparable benefits can be achieved through 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity spread across the week or a combination of moderate and vigorous intensity activity.

■ Adults should also undertake physical activity to improve muscle strength on at least two days a week.

■ All adults should minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (sitting) for extended periods.

Consistent exercise is critical for our health, wellbeing and longevity of life.