



time to go

We've all heard the benefits of being active and the recommendations to dedicate time every day to physical activity, but how? And when? OHbaby! fitness expert Renée Vincent offers advice

You may be familiar with the Ministry of Health's recommendation that you should aim to do 30 minutes of physical activity at least five times a week. This has been widely publicised in the last decade, but the World Health Organization has upped the game and is now recommending healthy adults strive for 60 minutes of exercise, five days a week – 300 minutes in total. "300 minutes!" I hear you cry, "I barely have time to walk to the letterbox, let alone visit the gym."

busy sitting still

Many parents who are juggling work, children and a million other responsibilities are surprised to find they should be more active. You probably feel like you already spend all day rushing around. However, 'rushing' simply describes the sense of urgency you feel, not the physical motion it suggests. In fact, a lot of 'rushing' can take place while driving your car, talking on your phone or sitting at your computer.

Most people are aware of the many physical and mental benefits of exercise. Nevertheless, a 2008 study showed that only 48.2% of New Zealanders were meeting the guidelines of 30 minutes of physical activity five times a week. This means that approximately half of the population are at risk of being affected by serious health problems related to inactivity, such as cardiovascular diseases, type-2 diabetes, breast and colon cancer, and osteoporosis.

In response to these findings, the key message from health promotion agencies and Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC) is that physical activity must become an absolute priority for you and your family. This means choosing to see movement as an opportunity to increase your activity levels and health rather than an inconvenience.

ready, set, go!

Ideally your life should be organised around moving as much as possible. For example, if you're late for kindy pick-up and have to jog up the street it is easy to see it as an inconvenience. With

a little positivity you could see it as an opportunity for an extra five minutes of moderate activity. Maybe you'll decide to park your car that far away every day.

Physical activity definitely doesn't have to be planned exercise or sport. It can be any movement produced by your muscles that results in you using energy. This covers a wide range of activities such as gardening or playing with your children. Practising the attitude recommended by SPARC might mean planning your social activities around physical activity. For instance:

- Catching up with a friend over a walk rather than a coffee.
- A family bike ride.
- Doing some gardening every day.
- Get the kids busy with outdoor play, and either join in, or do some active chores outside while the kids play.
- Climbing around the playground with your kids rather than sitting on a bench checking your phone.
- Combining activity with quality couple time by taking a dance class together, going on a bush walk or a bike ride.

If you feel that you're in a bit of a rut it might be time to try some new family-friendly sports (e.g. indoor rock climbing or tandem kayaking).

In a nutshell, try to be active as frequently and in as many different ways as possible. Remember that any 'wasted' or inefficient time is stealing time from your recommended 300 minutes of physical activity every week. Think to yourself: "I should be moving now. Do I really need to be sitting here watching TV, or could I be doing something active?" For this attitude to work it really helps to find an activity you enjoy.

If you're struggling with this then challenge yourself to try something new every week. You might do a bike ride one week, yoga for beginners the next, Pilates the week after that, and then a salsa class the next.

When you find something that clicks, commit to doing it regularly for at least six weeks. Put it in your diary and promise yourself that it will be non-negotiable –

you will do that activity at that time. If you're still enjoying it after six weeks you'll find it has become a habit.

that's intense

The health guidelines recommend at least 30 minutes a day of your physical activity is moderate in intensity – which means it makes you breathe harder than normal. Over time try to build up to including 20 minutes of vigorous exercise (this makes you huff and puff) three or four times a week.

If you have been very inactive lately you may have to start with a light intensity for only 10 minutes at a time and build up slowly to 30–60 minutes of moderate or vigorous exercise. If you only ever manage 10 minutes at a time, that's okay too – as long as you aim to achieve 300 minutes in total over the week.

Being active across our lifespan through all the different ages and stages is definitely a challenge. Barriers abound, such as fear of failure and feelings of inadequacy, as well as poor health, injury or disability. It helps to consider all the different ways you can be active and be willing to try new things. If your physical activity repertoire is too limited you are more likely to become inactive. The wider the range of activities you are open to and do on a regular basis, the more likely you will be able to stay active regardless of what is happening in your life.

If you become injured, for example, you might need to change your activity to rest the injured area (e.g. cycle rather than run); if you're ill you may have to reduce the intensity of activity; if you have limited time you may have to combine physical activity with other things; if you are scared to exercise alone you might need to join a group. In other words, whenever you find yourself not meeting the guidelines, ask yourself what the barrier is, work out a strategy to overcome it, and get moving. ●

OHbaby! fitness expert Renée Vincent is a physiotherapist at Total Mums in Auckland and mum to an energetic two-year-old.



your week in action sorted

Monday

- Walk to the park (20 mins)
- Jump on the trampoline with toddler (10 mins)
- Practice skipping with preschooler (10 mins)

Tuesday

- Load up a playlist of pop songs and dance with the kids (10 mins)
- Evening Pilates class (60 mins)

Wednesday

- Set up an obstacle course on the deck and run relays with the kids (20 mins)

Thursday

- Fitness DVD or YouTube clip (30 mins)
- Vacuum whole house (30 mins)

Friday

- Buggy walk with friend (45 mins)

Saturday

- Get Grandma to babysit and go for a bike ride with partner (45 mins)

Sunday

- Strength exercises on the lounge floor while watching TV (20 mins)