

By Dr ZAWIAH HASHIM & Dr CHIN YIT SIEW

Get up and move!

Physical activity confers many health benefits to people of all ages.

ACCORDING to the World Health Organization (WHO), physical inactivity is the fourth leading cause of disease and disability worldwide.

In spite of this scary fact, the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2015 showed that about one-third of adult Malaysians are physically inactive.

Many studies show that regular exercise can reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and cancer.

Let us discuss in greater detail why it is important not to lead a sedentary lifestyle and see how we can all get up and move.

Malaysians are inactive

The NHMS 2015 indicated that over 60% of adults were physically active. However, if we examine the findings in greater detail, it shows that the majority of these adults are only minimally active.

The reasons given by some for not taking up physical activities were: too difficult, not rewarding, uncomfortable, dangerous, or just generally uninteresting.

The NHMS report also indicated that adults with primary, secondary and tertiary education were more physically active than those with no formal education.

Even our younger generation is starting to give in to this culture of physical inactivity. In one study, Malaysian children recorded low physical activity levels and high sedentary behaviour, spending an average of almost seven hours daily in sedentary activities.

In contrast, the Malaysian Dietary Guidelines recommends to limit sedentary activities such as watching television, sitting or lying down to only two hours or less in a day.

A sedentary lifestyle can increase all causes of mortality, double the risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and obesity, and increase the risks of colon cancer, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, lipid disorders, depression and anxiety.

This growing problem, left unresolved, would lead to an overall depreciation of quality of life that would not only affect individuals, but also families, and certainly, the nation at large.

Being more physically active

The importance of physical activity to health is well recognised. Being physically active everyday, which should begin from a young age, can help to:

- Prevent chronic diseases (e.g. heart disease, diabetes, cancer).
- Maintain a healthy weight, thus preventing overweight and obesity, which are underlying risk factors for other major non-communicable diseases.
- Increase strength and performance of bones, muscle and joints.
- Improve mental and neurological health (e.g. improves mood, reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety).
- Improve overall health and wellbeing.

You should try to be more physically active every day in as many ways as possible any time you get a chance to. Whether it's in the house, at the office or while doing routine everyday tasks, physical activity should be practised and encouraged.

It would help to first get yourself into the right mind set. Think of physical activity and movement as an opportunity to exercise and stay



For families with children, physical activity also presents an opportunity to spend quality time together.



The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines for Children 2013 recommends that children accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity daily.

healthy, instead of an inconvenience. Making exercise a habit requires the right mindset and a smart approach. Once you incorporate physical activity as part of your daily routine, it will eventually become a habit. You will even learn to enjoy it.

You can refer to the Malaysian Physical Activity Pyramid, which can guide you on how to be physically active every day.

The base of the pyramid illustrates the kind of activities you should do most often on a daily basis. Meanwhile, the top of the pyramid indicates the type of sedentary activities or habits you should limit or spend less time doing.

Get your children to move

Physical activity should also start from young so that this habit will continue in later life. For families with children, physical activity also

presents an opportunity to spend quality time together. Weekends can be spent hiking or trail-walking in a nearby forest park, cycling around the neighbourhood, jogging around the park, row boating, competing in family walkathons or other activities that require a lot of movement, but are also fun for the whole family.

The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines for Children 2013 recommends that children accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity daily. Examples of moderate-intensity activities include running and chasing, cycling, swimming, football and badminton.

In addition to getting children to move more, it is also important to reduce the amount of time children remain sedentary. Set rules at home as to how much time can be spent watching TV or at what time of the day it is allowed.

The same goes to other electron-

ic gadgets (e.g. smart phones, tablets, PC's, gaming consoles).

Motivation to move forward

Another strategy to help you stick to the habit of being more physically active is to exercise with colleagues from office, or get a friend or your partner to commit to exercising with you.

That way, you have someone who can accompany you and keep you motivated to continue the habit - everyone involved benefits!

Setting achievable milestones and personal goals that you can pursue is also another great way to stay motivated (i.e. join marathons or participate in tournaments).

You could also motivate yourself by emulating certain role models whose philosophy and actions in life represent health,

vigour, physical strength and other positive values.

Similarly, you should be a good role model for your children as well.

Aim to achieve 10,000 steps a day, which is roughly equivalent to an hour of brisk walking. You can even opt to break this up into two, 30-minute sessions.

You can also monitor your daily steps through various apps available on your phone, using a pedometer or a smart watch/wrist band.

It not only helps to track your pace, distance and the number of calories burned, it also enables you to share your walking adventure with friends.

A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. It is not too late for you to start being physically active if you really put your heart and mind to it.

Teach your children to be physically active early on.

Besides being physically active, you should also adhere to a balanced and nutritious diet that includes various foods from the different food groups.

Dr Zawiah Hashim and Dr Chin Yit Siew are members of the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO). This article is contributed by Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2017, an annual community nutrition education initiative jointly organised by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia, Malaysian Dietitians' Association and Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity. To obtain more information on healthy eating and active lifestyle, visit NMM's Food-Fit-Fun Fair at Lower Ground, Centre Court Concourse, IOI City Mall, Putrajaya on April 19-23. Nutrition screening and counselling is available for free and lots of other goodies are up for grabs. Visit www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my or Nutrition Month Malaysia Facebook page for more information.