



Health



# Steps to becoming active - your way

powered by  
 doctor care  
anywhere.

# Sarah Kemp, Health and Wellbeing Programme Manager at AXA Health, shares some great tips to get active. Say goodbye to unsustainable fads and short-term gains and hello to achievable feelgood health and wellbeing.

If you've decided to start making healthier choices, moving more, loving your body and celebrating what it can do for you – it's the best choice you could possibly make for your physical and mental wellbeing.

The thought of getting more active can be a little intimidating at first, as can not knowing what to do, how long for, when's best, or even why you're doing it. If you don't know your isometrics from your plyometrics, don't panic, you're with the majority of the public and we've got your back.

Just know this; the basics work. When all's said and done – you'll reap the benefits of being active if you move your body in a way that you enjoy and feels good. Whether it's dancing in the kitchen, walking the dog, playing frisbee in the park, or an online yoga tutorial, keeping active doesn't have to be about the burn, or finding your abs (disclaimer: a six-pack will not make you happy) just do what's right for you because you love it, not because you feel you have to.

The NHS recommends that we do 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise a week. It might sound a lot and 'aerobic exercise' may sound off-putting, but it's easily broken up and if you do things you enjoy, you won't even notice the time passing.

It could be a 30-minute round-walk at lunch, during the working week. Or you can break it up into shorter bursts of 10 minutes, whatever works for you. In addition, the NHS also suggests at least two strength days working major muscle groups. But this doesn't have to be weight training – activities such as [swimming](#), [hiking](#) and yoga also build strength.

Of course, what you do depends on your existing health and mobility, as well as the journey you want to be on. Our goals and what motivates us are as individual as we are. I always recommend exercising for overall health and for the 'feelgood factor.' With so many reasons to be active, from mood-boosting endorphins, to improving heart health, to getting a good night's sleep, the aesthetic gains such as weight loss and muscle definition generally become irrelevant.



Activities such as swimming, hiking and yoga build strength





So, where do you start? Here are a few handy hints to think about before getting active, as well as some tips to help you fit physical activity into your busy life.

## First of all...

### Consider your reasons for becoming more active

It's important to understand your goals. For some it will be about reaching and maintaining a healthy weight. For others, it could be improving cardiovascular fitness, increasing their range of motion, or purely for the [mental health benefits](#).

If anything, weight loss is a bonus after the multitude of other benefits that physical activity provides for our long-term health, such as reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, as well helping to prevent injuries and mobility problems in later life and helping to alleviate symptoms of depression.

### Find what's right for you

If you don't enjoy running, don't do it! If gyms aren't your thing, don't join one! Finding something you enjoy can be half the battle, but once you do, you're more likely to stick to it and make it a regular habit. Variety is important if you get bored easily and, depending on what your goals are, different activities will bring different health benefits. For example:

**Aerobic activity**, such as running, swimming and [cycling](#) will help to increase cardiorespiratory fitness, as well as make you feel good afterwards. More commonly known as our 'happy hormones', our body releases endorphins when we exercise, triggering a positive feeling. Once the body is used to doing this type of exercise, it also adapts and becomes more efficient, which can increase motivation too!

**Resistance training** is not only effective for strengthening muscles, but also the connective tissues that surround the joints; your ligaments, tendons and cartilage.

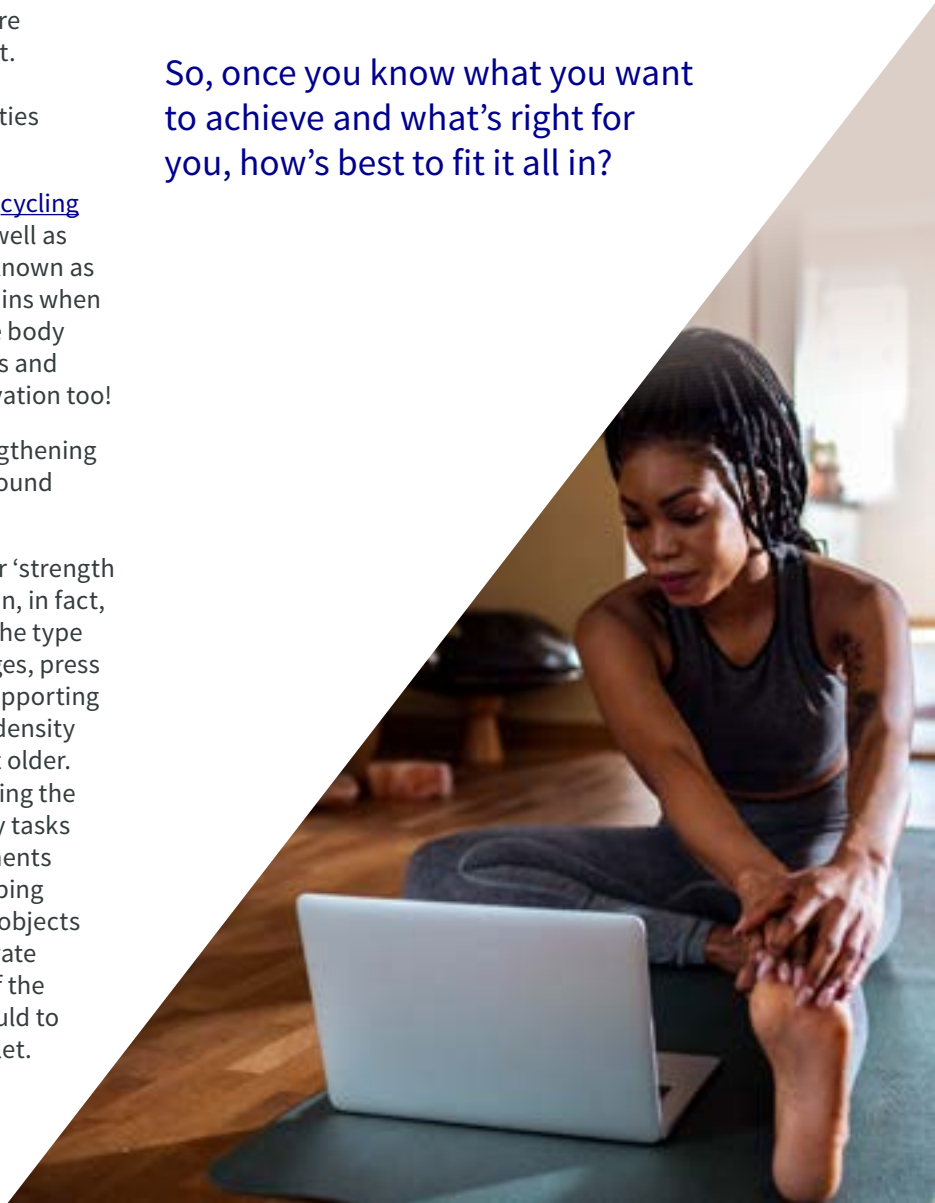
Many people tend to worry that resistance work or 'strength training' might make them look too muscular when, in fact, it provides so many more benefits depending on the type of training you do. For example, basic squats, lunges, press ups, etc. can be really good for our posture and supporting our joints, as well as helping us to maintain bone density and muscle mass, which we start to lose as we get older. This can help us to stay mobile and flexible, reducing the risk of injuries or falls, as well as aid us in everyday tasks that may become more difficult as we age. Movements we don't often think about, such as carrying shopping bags, getting in and out of a chair, or lifting heavy objects in the house, can all be made easier if we incorporate resistance exercises into our lives. We use many of the same muscle groups to perform a squat as we would to crouch down and tie our shoes, or to sit on the toilet.

**Yoga and Pilates**, and other relaxation based practices can provide many benefits to health and wellbeing. They are easily accessible, can be practised in the comfort of your own home and often require minimal equipment. There are many online tutorials and classes to get stuck into, so give one a go!

Yoga is an Ancient practice that takes many forms, so it's easy to find a style to suit you. Practising often can have a positive impact on mental health, calming the mind, relaxing the body and helping to manage stress and anxiety. It can also help you to get a better sleep, and that's alongside all of the physical benefits!

Pilates is focused on developing and strengthening the muscles in the body that we don't necessarily see. Alongside this, it helps to align posture and improve strength, and is particularly good for those who may be starting out on their fitness journey, coming back from injury or who experience back pain.

So, once you know what you want to achieve and what's right for you, how's best to fit it all in?



## Finding time

There's always time, if you really dig deep. It might mean getting up earlier, or using your lunch break, toddler nap time, or prepping your dinners at the weekend to free up more time in the evening for a post-work wiggle. That social media rabbit-hole we often find ourselves in – imagine less time hunched over our phones scrolling and more time moving!

If you really don't have time – for example if you have a busy week coming up – it's useful to know that even small amounts of activity can be beneficial to our physical and mental health. In fact, this activity breaks up time spent sitting and can have positive lasting effects on our long-term health. Excessive sitting is linked to weight gain and obesity, some cancers and type 2 diabetes. It also slows the metabolism, which can affect how our body regulates blood sugar, as well as breaking down body fat. The good news is that it IS possible to reduce these risks by getting up and about for five minutes every half an hour. Cleaning and [gardening](#) are also good examples of moderate activity that count towards your 150 minute target each week.

## Home workouts

There are times when you may not feel like leaving the house, especially in winter, that's fine - we hear you! A home workout isn't any less effective than going out for a run, cycle, swim, or gym – and you save time because you haven't had to go anywhere. You can create a little home workout circuit, using stairs, chairs or sofas for your resistance exercises. Just pick 5 or 6 moves to repeat, 10 times each – then complete 3 to 5 rounds, or however many you can fit into 20 minutes. If you're feeling uninspired, there are online classes that you can sign up to and do virtually. Get creative and use things around the house to create some resistance – load some cans into a backpack, grab the laundry detergent bottle or simply use water bottles. Bootcamp at home, no problem!



It's useful to know that even small amounts of activity can be beneficial to our physical and mental health

## Habit stacking

One way of finding time for physical activity and maintaining consistency is to attach an activity onto something you already do. For example, can you do 20 squats while brushing your teeth every morning? How about 10 press ups while you wait for the kettle to boil? Repeating the same activity at the same time every day will help it become effortless and engrained into your lifestyle.

Everyone's health journey is different, there's no single 'correct' way, as we all find joy in different activities, whether that's with family, friends or on your own. But what's certain is that once you've found your feelgood activity, you won't look back – and when life throws curveballs and you find yourself off the wagon – it's so much easier to get back on.



Health

