

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TRIANGLE: Sitting less and moving more with the Physical Activity Triangle

Living healthily? This includes a healthy mix of sitting, standing and moving. But what is that healthy mix? And how do you approach it? The Flemish Institute Healthy Living has summarised it for you in the Physical Activity Triangle, along with a few Healthy Life tips to make a real difference.



gezondleven.be

© VLAAMS INSTITUUT GEZOND LEVEN 2017

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TRIANGLE VLAAMS INSTITUUT  
**GEZOND  
LEVEN**

## What is the best thing for you to do?

### 1. Sit less and move more

Do you move or exercise a lot? Great, because physical activity is healthy. It's *just as* important that you don't sit still for too long at once. Regularly interrupt long periods of sitting by standing up or going for a little wander. You'll soon notice: it feels good!

### 2. Take it one step at a time

Do you often sit still for long, uninterrupted periods of time? It's time to put a gradual stop to that. Begin by regularly standing up—every half hour if possible.

What if you're not moving much besides this? Introduce more physical activity into your life, little by little. Because every little bit of physical activity is better than nothing. Try, for example, to bring a few minutes of physical activity into your day-to-day life at your own tempo.

Choose goals you can achieve; you really don't need to climb Everest. Every step you take in line with the health recommendations is a victory. Don't give up just because you've had a small relapse.

### 3. Pursue a healthy mix every day

Make a habit of swapping between sitting, standing and moving every day. Try to spend the largest part of the day in light-intensity physical activity while you perform your tasks: for example, you could walk more at work. Also make sure you move at a moderate intensity every day: cycling to work is an example of this. How does the idea of a weekly session of high-intensity physical activity feel? By playing a sport for example? You'll then tick every box on the health card. Don't forget to strengthen your muscles every week.

### *How can you move sufficiently and sit less?*

### 4. Vary where you move and sit less

Keep your eyes open for opportunities to sit less and move more. Don't just limit physical activity to your free time, but also think about what you can do when you're commuting or at home and at work or at school.

## **5. Swap your less healthy choices for healthy habits**

Do you often sit still for long periods of time? Get out of your chair regularly and stand up or go for a walk. You could also choose a different form of physical activity: go for a bike ride instead of spending time playing on the internet for example.

Maybe sitting still is not so much of a problem for you, but you want to be more active and improve your fitness. Take it up a gear: replace your daily dose of light-intensity activities with moderately intensive pursuits. Don't increase the length of time you walk, just up the pace. This will work better than immediately aiming for intensive jogging.

## **6. Feel good**

Do you enjoy a mix of sitting, standing and moving in your daily life? It will leave you feeling better, fitter and healthier. But it's difficult to take the first steps and to keep pursuing them. Think of a reward for yourself that fits into your healthy approach. For example, you could plan a nice trip with family or friends. Give yourself a pat on the shoulder after a healthy day. And most of all: choose something that you would really like to do. Otherwise, you'll give up in no time.

## **7. Think ahead and plan accordingly**

Make deals with yourself—and with others too. For a lot of people, this approach makes it easier to sit less and move more. Construct your own plan as follows:

- ✓ *What* are you going to do? For example: 'I'll watch less TV and go walking more frequently.'
- ✓ *Where* are you going to do it? For example: at home and in your neighbourhood.
- ✓ *When* are you going to do it and for *how long*? For example: a quarter of an hour every Saturday afternoon.
- ✓ *Who* will help you with this? Or are you going to do it alone? Moving together is more motivating and more enjoyable. Especially as a family: you encourage your children and set a good example.

Think in advance about the possible difficulties. And work out solutions. For example: pack wet-weather gear when you go biking and it's cloudy. Prepare for the worst and hope for the best!

## **8. Adjust your environment**

Set up your environment so that the healthy choice is the most accessible. And make it more difficult for yourself to choose the less healthy option. You can 'block out' sitting still for shorter periods and moving more. Put your walking shoes and jacket at the front of the cupboard so that it's easier to get ready and go for your walk.

## The Physical Activity Triangle in colour

- **Orange zone**

Sedentary behaviour or sitting still for long periods: Flemish people do this a lot. Sedentary behaviour is anything you do that uses very little energy—things like sitting still or lying down. Sleeping doesn't belong to this category.

On average, we spend more than eight hours a day sitting down: at home, at school and at work. We also do it when we are commuting; we sit in the car or on the train. And in our free time, we play with the computer, go to the cinema or read a book.

Every new day is an invitation to spend a lot of time sitting down. And that's not okay: a healthy day consists of a healthy mix of sitting, standing and moving or exercising. We feel better physically and mentally if we limit the amount of time that we spend sitting down.

If you look at the Physical Activity Triangle, you'll find that your sedentary behaviour or time spent sitting still belongs in the orange zone.

- **Light-green zone**

Physical activity is healthy. That's why you find it in the green zone. The greener the zone, the more intensive the physical activity.

There are more benefits to light-intensity physical activity than you realise ... You'll also find light-intensity physical activity in the lowest layer of the green zone in the Physical Activity Triangle. Try to spend the largest part of every day moving at light intensity while you perform your tasks: for example, you could stand at the computer, do the vacuuming or take the stairs rather than the elevator.

- **Middle-green zone**

A lot of Flemish people don't move enough to be healthy. After all, healthy physical activity demands more than going for a stroll. Nevertheless, brisk walking, recreational swimming or cycling are within reach for many people and are good for the body and soul.

Daily physical activity at moderate intensity delivers more health benefits than physical activity at light intensity: both physically and mentally. If you move at moderate intensity, you'll breathe faster and your heart will beat more quickly. You're not out of breath and you can still talk. You'll find this approach to move in the middle of the green zone of the

Physical Activity Triangle. The intensity of physical activity of the layers below and above is respectively lower and higher.

- **Dark-green zone**

The dark-green zone is found at the top of the Physical Activity Triangle. This zone is for high-intensity physical activity: jogging, a game of basketball, etc.

How does it differ from the middle and lower layers? If you exercise at high intensity, you'll also sweat. Being physically active at high intensity has extra benefits for your health in comparison to moving at moderate and low intensity. So, move at high intensity at least once a week for the best health bonuses!

And last but not least, try to train—and therefore strengthen—your muscles on at least a weekly basis.

*The Physical Activity Triangle is based on an expanded literature study, consultation with experts and focus groups with the target group.*