

## **MAY 10 – WORLD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DAY**

From a public health perspective, physical activity is a behavior that directly and indirectly affects the health of the population. Numerous studies support this statement by confirming the impact of physical activity in the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases. According to estimates by the World Health Organization, around 5 million deaths annually are associated with insufficient physical activity, and therefore World Physical Activity Day has been celebrated since 2002 to encourage each of us to move more for better global health. Today, physical activity occupies an important place in public health and is becoming a key component of strategies for improving population health that are being developed and implemented around the world. In developed countries, there are systems for monitoring the level of physical activity among adults, as well as among children and adolescents.

### **What is physical activity?**

Physical activity refers to any bodily movement that activates the musculoskeletal system, increases energy expenditure, and represents a fundamental means of improving people's physical and mental health, while also reducing the risks of many noncommunicable diseases. Physical activity can be achieved through play, work, walking, household chores, and recreational activities, and it should not be confused with exercise. Exercise is a subcategory of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and intentional, with the objective of improving or maintaining one or more components of physical fitness.

Physical inactivity (insufficient physical activity) is one of the leading risk factors for noncommunicable diseases and death worldwide. Insufficient physical activity increases the risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes by 20–30% and shortens life expectancy by 3 to 5 years. In addition, physical inactivity places a burden on society through hidden and increasing healthcare costs and loss of productivity.

### **Key facts**

- Regular physical activity provides significant benefits for both physical and mental health.
- In adults, physical activity contributes to the prevention and management of noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and diabetes. It also reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, improves mental health, and positively affects overall well-being.
- In children and adolescents, physical activity promotes bone health, supports healthy muscle growth and development, and improves motor and cognitive development.
- 31% of adults and 80% of the world's adolescent population do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity.
- The global estimated cost of physical inactivity to public health systems between 2020 and 2030 is around 300 billion U.S. dollars (approximately 27 billion U.S. dollars annually) if levels of physical inactivity are not reduced.

## **How much and what type of physical activity does the World Health Organization recommend?**

### **Children and adolescents aged 5–17 years**

- They should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily.
- Physical activity exceeding 60 minutes per day provides additional health benefits.
- Activities that strengthen muscles and bones should be included at least 3 times per week.

### **Adults aged 18–64 years**

- They should engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity.
- For additional health benefits, adults should increase their moderate-intensity physical activity to 300 minutes per week.
- Muscle- and bone-strengthening activities involving major muscle groups are recommended at least 2 times per week.

### **Adults aged 65 years and older**

- They should engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity.
- For additional health benefits, they should increase their moderate-intensity physical activity to 300 minutes per week.
- Those with poor mobility should perform exercises to improve balance and prevent falls 3 or more times per week.
- Muscle- and bone-strengthening activities involving major muscle groups are recommended at least 2 times per week.

The intensity of different forms of physical activity varies among individuals. To improve cardiorespiratory health, each session of activity should last at least 10 minutes.

### **Benefits of physical activity and risks of insufficient physical activity**

Regular moderate-intensity physical activity, such as walking or cycling, provides significant health benefits. Any form of physical activity is better than none. By becoming more active throughout the day in relatively simple ways, people can easily achieve the recommended levels of activity.

Regular and adequate physical activity contributes to:

- Improving muscular and cardiorespiratory fitness;

- Improving bone health and functional capacity;
- Reducing the risk of hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, various types of cancer, and depression;
- Reducing the risk of falls, as well as hip or spine fractures in older adults.

Insufficient physical activity is one of the leading risk factors for mortality worldwide and is increasing in many countries, directly affecting global health. People who are insufficiently active have a 20% to 30% higher risk of death compared to those who are physically active.

### **How can physical activity be increased?**

Governments must take action to provide individuals with more opportunities to be active in order to increase physical activity through the following measures:

- Cooperation with relevant sectors to promote physical activity through everyday activities;
- Walking paths, cycling lanes, and other forms of active transportation that are accessible and safe for everyone;
- Workplace and labor policies that encourage physical activity;
- Schools with safe spaces and facilities where students can be active during their free time;
- Quality physical education that helps children develop behaviors that will keep them physically active throughout life;
- Adequate sports and recreational facilities for all.

### **Global action plan on physical activity**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the commitment of world leaders to develop ambitious national responses to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an opportunity to refocus and renew efforts to promote physical activity. The World Health Organization is working on a new global action plan that will utilize contributions from all relevant sectors, especially the environment, education, healthcare, sports, and technology, in order to accelerate progress toward achieving the global sustainable development goals set for 2030.

**Be active and stay healthy!**