



THEME 2

Physical activity

Theme introduction

Background

Being physically active is important to maintain and improve physical and mental well-being, to prevent long-term health conditions and in weight management. There is an obvious link with the healthy eating topic – keeping and maintaining a healthy body weight depends on a balance between energy intake from food and energy used up by the body's functions and physical activity.

There are social and economic barriers to taking up organised physical activity: lack of confidence, transport, time and money are just some of the factors that prevent people from accessing leisure or sports facilities. However, it is important to stress to learners that physical activity does not need to involve organised activities such as joining a gym or attending exercise classes. Many everyday activities such as housework, do-it-yourself, brisk walking and gardening involve physical activity. In these materials the term 'physical activity' is used rather than 'exercise' to get this point across.

National targets/policies

The Public Health England guidance: Health matters: getting every adult active every day (2016) sets out the Government's plans to encourage and promote participation in physical activity in England.

Increasing physical activity has the potential to improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and the nation as a whole. Public Health England (PHE) wants to see more people being physically active.

Adults in England should aim to take part in at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more, according to physical activity guidelines for adults (physical activity guidelines for adults) from the UK Chief Medical Officers.

Moderate intensity physical activities, such as brisk walking or cycling, cause adults to get warmer and breathe harder making their hearts beat faster, but they can still carry on a conversation.

All adults should aim to be active daily and should include muscle strengthening activity, such as exercising with weights, yoga or carrying heavy shopping, on at least 2 days a week. This can help lower the risk of sarcopenia, or loss of muscle mass, which is associated with ageing but also occurs in response to immobility at any age. Individuals at risk of falls should also do balance exercises twice a week.

Loss of muscle can often then lead to a downward spiral in which reduced exercise capacity results in less activity being undertaken, and a worsening of the loss of capacity.

As well as being physically active, all adults are advised to minimise the time spent being sedentary (sitting) for extended periods. Even among individuals who are active at the recommended levels, spending large amounts of time sedentary increases the risk of adverse health outcomes.

Many adults spend in excess of 7 hours per day sedentary, and this typically increases with age.

Everyone should be encouraged to reduce the amount of sedentary time by:

- reducing time spent watching TV, using a computer or playing video games
- taking regular time not sitting during work
- breaking up sedentary time, such as swapping a long bus or car journey for walking part of the way¹

This theme

The topics in this theme are:

- Being active
- Using leisure facilities
- Following a movement class
- Heart rate and pulse

Further information and suggestions

- **'Green Gyms'** offer people the opportunity to undertake physical activity while working outside on environmental projects such as woodland management. Recent evidence suggests that people expend more calories on such projects than during formal exercise classes and in addition gain general health and social benefits (www.greengym.org.uk).
- **Walking for Health** aims to get more people walking in their own communities, especially those who take little exercise or live in areas of poor health (www.walkingforhealth.org.uk).
- Many community parks now have outside gyms that are fun and free to use.
- Parkrun organise free weekly 5km runs on Saturday mornings. People of all abilities are encouraged to take part (parkrun.org.uk).
- Sport England provides lots of information on ways to access activities regardless of age, background or gender (www.sportengland.org).
- For information on getting active with a disability or long term health condition, go to <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/get-active-with-a-disability/>. For fitness advice for wheelchair users, go to <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/wheelchair-users-fitness-advice/>.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-getting-every-adult-active-every-day>

Mapping to Functional Skills/Core Curriculum

Topic	Functional Skills		Core Curriculum	
	English	Maths	Literacy/Language (L)	Numeracy (N)
1 Being active	E3.4 E3.8	E3.21	SlD/E3.1 Rw/E3.1	HD1/E3.1
2 Using leisure facilities	E3.9 E3.8	E3.21 L1.20	Rt/E3.7 Rw/E3.1	HD1/E3.1 MSS1/L1.3
3 Following a movement class	E3.6 E3.8 E3.2		Lr/E3.1 Rw/E3.1 Sc/E3.4	
4 Heart rate and pulse		L1.20 L1.8 L1.14		MSS1/L1.3 N2/L1.3 N2/L1.9