

Being physically active means different things for different people. Some people like to walk or belly dance while others play soccer or run marathons. Being active is important but the goal is to be active enough to achieve health benefits? By investing in a variety of different physical activities, women 55–70 have the opportunity to 'bank' their health benefits as they age.

Physical activities are broken into three main categories: endurance; strengthening and flexibility. It is important that all people, and in particular women 55–70, incorporate activities from all three categories to maximize health benefits.

## Endurance Activities

Endurance activities get your heart pumping and are often called cardiovascular or aerobic activities. These activities strengthen your muscles, heart and lungs and also burn the greatest amount of calories, helping with weight loss or weight maintenance.

**Canada's Physical Activity Guide recommends that adults start by doing 60 minutes of light endurance activities, then build up to doing 30–60 minutes of moderate or 20–30 minutes of vigorous physical activity 4–7 days a week.**

When doing vigorous activities the heart should be working at 75% maximum capacity, for moderate it is 65% and for light it is 56%. To calculate maximum heart rate, the following formula is used:  $220 - \text{your age} \div 6 = \text{maximum 10 second heart rate}$ . Based on this formula, a 60 year old woman would have a maximum 10 second heart rate of 27 ( $220 - 60 \div 6$ ). To determine heart rate the pulse should be taken for a count of 10 seconds. Measuring this regularly allows for modification as it will indicate if the heart is working too hard or not hard enough to achieve health benefits.

Examples of endurance activities include: walking, swimming, cycling, yard work, dancing or tennis – anything that gets your heart pumping.

## Strengthening Activities

Strengthening activities help muscles and bones stay strong. As people grow older, their muscle fibers shrink in number and in size, contributing to a decrease in strength, balance, and coordination. Strength training can substantially slow and even reverse, declines in muscle mass, bone density, and strength. Strength training lowers the risk of developing osteoporosis and fractures and helps alleviate arthritis symptoms by strengthening the muscles, tendons, and ligaments that surround joints.

**Canada's Physical Activity Guide recommends that adults participate in strengthening activities for 20 to 30 minutes, 2 to 4 times a week.**

This kind of training can be done using free weights, machines or exercising in water. To ensure good overall strength, it is important to do a combination of activities that work the muscles in the arms, mid-section, and legs.

Most women understand the importance of cardiovascular activities such as walking or swimming but strength training will be something new for many and might be seen as something 'men' do. Be sure to communicate the benefits of strength training and provide extra instruction to make these women feel comfortable.

Examples of strengthening activities include: lifting and carrying groceries; climbing stairs; abdominal exercises; push-ups; and weight/strength-training routines – anything that gives you resistance.



## Flexibility Activities

Flexibility activities help you to move easier, keeping your muscles relaxed and increasing the range of motion in joints. Flexibility is important because it improves muscle balance and posture and reduces the chance of injury and muscle soreness.

**Canada's Physical Activity Guide recommends that adults participate in flexibility activities for 20 to 30 minutes, 2 to 4 times a week.**

For women 55–70, stretching is very important as muscles are not as flexible as when they were younger and need extra stretching to be loosened up.

Examples of flexibility activities include: yoga, pilates, gardening, vacuuming, stretching exercises, T'ai Chi, bowling and curling – anything that involves gentle reaching, bending, and stretching of all the muscle groups.

## Next Steps – Communicating Physical Activity Measures

- Communicate to women 55–70 the importance of participating in all three categories of physical activity – endurance, strength and flexibility.
- Assess the current physical activity patterns of women 55–70 to ensure they are involved in activities from all three categories. If they are not provide information on what they should add to achieve maximum health benefits
- Educate women 55–70 on how endurance, strength training and flexibility activities can help them prevent, prepare and/or recover from surgery, injury or illness.
- Promote using a pedometer or physical activity log as a way to track daily progress and motivate women to move more.
- Instead of focusing on weight or inches as measures, focus on being able, feeling great, or sleeping better.
- Explain the physical activity process and that hurting at the beginning is normal.

## Tools

Canada's Physical Activity Guide

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/index.html>

May 2008

**Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) Tel: 613-562-5667**

For more information on the *CAAWS Women 55–70 and Physical Activity* project please contact [caaws@caaws.ca](mailto:caaws@caaws.ca) or visit the website at: [www.caaws.ca/women55plus/index.cfm](http://www.caaws.ca/women55plus/index.cfm)

*Production of this fact sheet has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.*