



# Starting an exercise programme

## Why start an exercise programme?

People start exercising for many reasons. For some, it is to prevent a heart attack or diabetes, for others to lose weight or to increase fitness. Doctors often advise an exercise programme following a diagnosis of high cholesterol or high blood pressure.

Whatever the reason, there is plenty of scientific evidence to show that even moderate exercise is of benefit to your health and well-being.

## Safety first

It is important to know how to start an exercise programme safely. To see a jogger sweating it out down the road or a squash player in action is a poor role model for a newcomer to an exercise programme. This is because such activity can be dangerous for unfit people. It can also be quite discouraging to engage in an activity that causes too much fatigue and sweating, not to mention sore muscles.

The current belief is that your health can benefit from even moderate levels of exercise on most, or every day of the week. Activity may be in a single session or accumulated in bouts of eight to 10 minutes up to 30 minutes a day.

## Changing our lifestyle

We can achieve these levels of physical activity with a lifestyle approach. First we must be conscious of just how inactive we have become in this high tech, automated society. Life has become so convenient that our activity level has reduced substantially from our parents' and grandparents' generations. We need to compensate for this

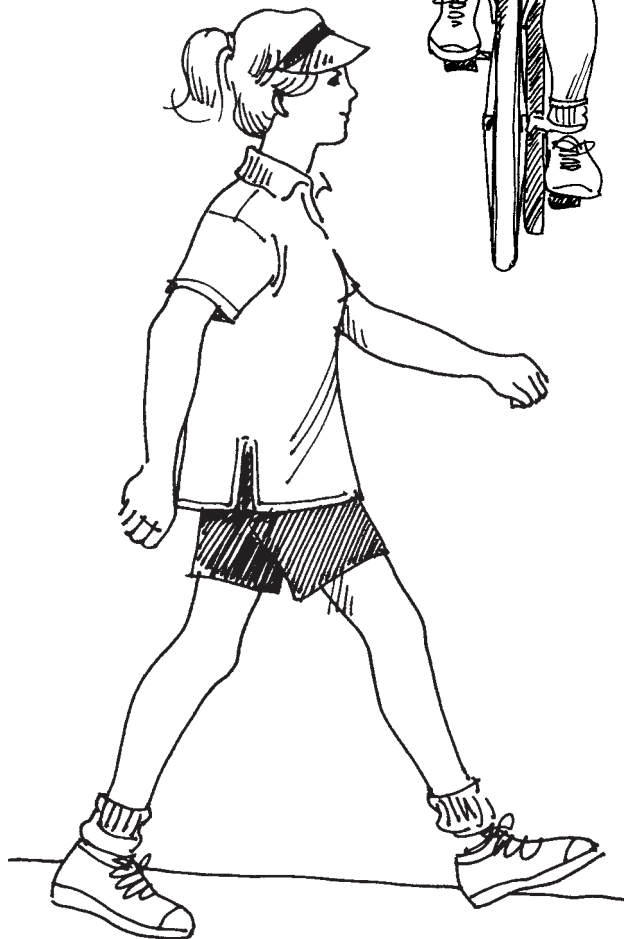
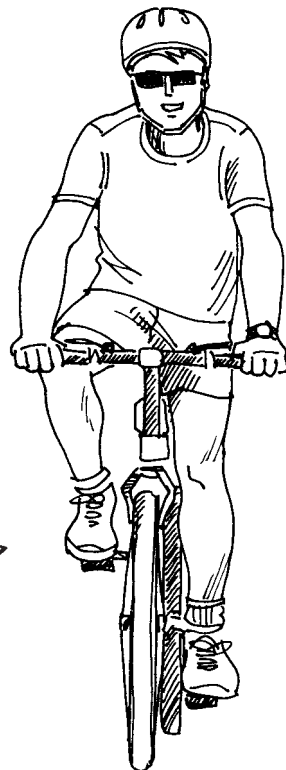
sedentary lifestyle by moving more in our day to day activities. We need to see walking as an opportunity rather than an inconvenience.

## Getting regular exercise

We need also to plan regular activity. This can be walking, swimming, cycling, gardening, or any exercise that uses the large muscles in the arms or legs. At least 30 minutes moderate exercise, accumulated over the day, is preferable to more strenuous exercise done less frequently. As your fitness improves, you will find it easier to do more.

## What is moderate exercise?

A good guide to what is meant by moderate is how puffed we become. The breathing rate and depth should increase, but only to a level where carrying on a conversation easily is still



possible. If you are so puffed that talking is difficult, then you need to reduce the level of your activity.

## What is the best sort of exercise?

Walking is at the top of the list because it is easy, cheap, relaxing, easy on joints, the best for burning fat and generally safe. However, some people prefer other activities. It really doesn't matter what type of exercise, if it is built up gradually and done at moderate intensity for as long as possible.

## What about exercise machines?

Exercise machines have their place, but it should be understood that they may not be as beneficial as walking. However, there may be weather and safety reasons why a home machine is helpful. But remember, if the machine does not work you hard, then it doesn't work.

It is important to choose an activity that is enjoyable and one that you will keep doing it in the long term. It needs to become a natural part of your daily routine. It may take time to achieve this, but there are long-term rewards for both your general health and well-being.

It may require much effort in the early stages to develop a daily routine of regular exercise, but after a few weeks the day doesn't seem complete without it. Then you know you are winning!

