



# Exercise



**Muslim Health Service**

***Supporting the NHS***

# ***Why do we need to be active?***

A few generations ago, exercise was a part of people's everyday lives. Many people did physical work as part of their jobs. Transport was less advanced and people often had to walk quite long distances. Household chores were also more demanding without washing machines, dish washers, microwaves, vacuum cleaners and other gadgets.

Nowadays most people work at their desk and need to do very little physical activity as part of their daily lives. Although we may feel that our lives are now much easier because of this, **lack of physical activity is in fact harmful to our health.**

## ***How does lack of exercise harm our health?***

People who are inactive are more likely to:

1. Be overweight or obese
2. Develop long term health problems such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke
3. Develop joint problems as they grow older
4. Develop back pain
5. Suffer injuries because their muscles have become weaker and their joints stiffer
6. Feel tired more easily than people who keep fit

## ***What are the Benefits of Exercise?***

**Keeping fit and maintaining good health** – Regular activity strengthens the heart and reduces the risk of heart disease. It also improves our immunity and makes our bodies better able to fight infection.

**Losing weight** – Exercise is one of the best ways to lose weight. When weight is lost through eating a low calorie, balanced diet and taking exercise, the weight loss usually lasts longer.

**Relaxation and Stress Relief** – Exercise helps relieve the stress that can build up in our daily lives and also gives us time to unwind.

**Opportunity to spend quality time with loved ones and make new friends** – Physical activities such as team sports can give us the opportunity to make new friends and build on existing relationships. Even other activities such as swimming, walking or going to the gym can be done in the company of others.

# ***How much exercise do we need?***

Different people need different amounts of exercise depending on their level of fitness and lifestyle. The following tips can help decide how much exercise to include in our routine.

Health professionals recommend around **30 minutes of moderate physical activity** (exercise that makes you sweat and run out of breath) **at least five days a week.**

**Regular exercise:** it is more beneficial to do smaller amounts of physical activity regularly rather than intense bouts of exercise infrequently and irregularly. Therefore it is important to do as much exercise as we can sustain on a regular basis.

**Build up the level of activity slowly:** when we start exercising, it takes time for our bodies to get use to the activity. If we exercise too vigorously we can injure ourselves and also feel too drained to do the same the next day.

Therefore it is important to be realistic about our level of fitness and slowly building up our level of physical activity over weeks and months. Building up our level of activity can also give us goals to work towards and motivate us in our work out sessions.

# ***What kind of exercise should we do?***

The kind of exercise that works best for us depends on individual factors. The exercise regime we choose should be something that is:

**Enjoyable** – choosing something that we find enjoyable makes it more likely that we will regularly take part in it rather than putting it off.

**Relatively Easy** – the regime we choose shouldn't be too difficult either on our bodies or in terms of fitting in to our daily lives. It can be something we do as part of our normal lives such as walking when possible and taking the stairs instead of the lift.

**Useful for working out our whole body** – it is important to work out as many parts of the body as possible as that is more helpful to our overall fitness.

# ***What does Islam say about Exercise?***

Islamic Philosophy teaches that Physical Fitness is a very important part of our lives especially because our bodies are a gift to us from our Creator and we are charged with the duty of looking after them. We are answerable for how well we look after them.

In fact physical activity is so important in Islam that **the five daily prayers incorporate movement of all the major joints and muscle groups of the body from head to toe.**

Muslims are also encouraged to maintain a good level of physical fitness by the requirement to fast and perform pilgrimage which are physically demanding activities.

Sports are encouraged in Islamic teachings as part of a healthy lifestyle.

In some communities Islam is misinterpreted as discouraging women from taking part in sports and other physical activities.

However, there is no factual basis to these misinterpretations. In fact the changes to a woman's body resulting from childbirth and menopause make it especially important that she has regular exercise. Without physical activity, many women develop problems with bladder control and back problems following child birth. Post menopausal osteoporosis can also be slowed down with regular exercise. Depression, which is more common amongst women, responds well to regular exercise.

These reasons show why from an Islamic point of view it is even more important for a woman to do exercise as it is vital in her maintaining good health.

# ***Where can I take exercise?***

- **Find out what is available in your local community** – Often there are facilities which are local such as community sports centres, community owned gyms and swimming pools. These facilities are often affordable and offer discounted or even free memberships.
- **The Park** – The park is a good place for walking, jogging or even for a game of football.
- **Out and about** - exercise can simply involve going for a walk around your neighbourhood or walking home from the shops/work instead of driving and taking the stairs instead of the lift.
- **At home** – Some exercises such as pilates, aerobics and yoga can be done from the comfort of your own home with the help of an instructional video.