Stride

KEEP ON MOVING | WELLNESS GUIDE | MYTH VS FACT

The Movement FAQ Myth vs Fact

15 common questions about exercise, the gym, running and everyday movement, answered with verified evidence.

Short answers, honest caveats and a numbered source for every claim, so you can move with confidence, whatever your starting point.

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Accountability. Family. Fitness.

CHAPTER 1

How Much Movement Is Enough?

QUESTION 1 · HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

How much exercise do I really need each week?

MYTH	If I can't do an hour at the gym, it isn't worth it.
FACT	**WHO recommends 150–300 minutes of moderate activity a week (or 75–150 of vigorous), plus muscle strengthening on two or more days. All activity counts, with no minimum bout length.**[1]

People who did some activity but less than the guideline already had roughly 20% lower mortality than inactive people, and those who met the minimum had about 31% lower.[2] This was a pooled analysis of leisure-time activity, so it shows a strong association rather than proof.[2]

TRY THIS Start where you are. A 10-minute brisk walk after your largest meal counts.

QUESTION 2 · HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Do I need to hit 10,000 steps a day?

MYTH	10,000 steps is a magic threshold.
FACT	**In a meta-analysis of 15 cohorts, risk of death fell as steps rose, levelling off around 6,000–8,000 steps a day for adults 60 and over and 8,000–10,000 for younger adults.**[3]

The analysis covered 47,471 adults. People in the most active quarter (median about 10,900 steps a day) had about 53% lower risk of death than the least active (about 3,550 steps).[3] It is observational, so people who walk more may differ in other ways.[3] The 10,000 figure is not a cliff edge, and any increase beats none.

TRY THIS Check your average over three days, then aim to add 1,000–2,000 steps.

QUESTION 3 · HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

I only have a few minutes. Does short exercise count?

MYTH	Workouts under 30 minutes are a waste of time.
FACT	**WHO says all activity counts with no minimum bout length, and a large UK study linked about three one-to-two-minute vigorous bursts a day to a 38–40% lower risk of death.**[1,4]

The UK Biobank study followed 25,241 people who did not exercise in their leisure time and wore activity trackers. Those who did about three short bursts of vigorous effort during daily life, such as hurrying up stairs, had a 38–40% lower risk of death from any cause than those who did none.[4] It was observational, so it shows an association, not proof.[4]

TRY THIS Take stairs briskly, or walk fast for a minute or two when you're heading somewhere.

QUESTION 4 · HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Does it count if I only exercise on weekends?

MYTH	You must exercise every day or it doesn't help.
FACT	**In a cohort of 350,978 US adults, people who fitted their activity into one or two sessions a week had similar mortality benefits to those who spread it out, when total activity was equal.**[5]

Researchers compared "weekend warriors" (one or two sessions a week) with "regularly active" adults (three or more sessions) and with inactive people. Both active groups had lower all-cause and cause-specific mortality than inactive adults, and the two active patterns did not differ significantly once total moderate-to-vigorous activity was accounted for.[5] It is an observational study based on self-reported activity.[5]

TRY THIS If weekdays are packed, plan one longer walk, run or game at the weekend and add a few short strength moves midweek.

CHAPTER 2

Fat Loss: What Actually Works

QUESTION 5 · FAT LOSS

Can I burn belly fat with sit-ups?

MYTH	Doing lots of crunches will melt belly fat.
FACT	**In a six-week trial, abdominal exercises strengthened the core but did not reduce abdominal fat, waist size or body fat.**[6]

Twenty-four adults were randomised to an exercise group or a control group. The exercise group did a programme of abdominal exercises five days a week for six weeks. There was no significant effect on body weight, body-fat percentage, abdominal fat or waist circumference, although muscular endurance improved.[6] Fat is lost across the body, not from the one spot you train.

TRY THIS Train your core for strength and posture, and lose fat through overall activity and food choices.

QUESTION 6 · FAT LOSS

Is cardio or weight training better for losing fat?

MYTH	You must pick one: cardio melts fat, weights just build muscle.
FACT	**In an 8-month trial, aerobic training reduced fat mass, resistance training built lean mass, and combining both gave the best change in body-fat percentage.**[7]

The STRRIDE AT/RT trial randomised 119 sedentary adults with overweight or obesity to resistance training, aerobic training or both. Aerobic training reduced fat mass more than resistance training alone, while resistance and combined programmes increased lean mass.[7] The combined programme needed roughly double the time and did not reduce fat mass significantly more than aerobic training alone.[7]

TRY THIS If time is short, brisk walking, jogging or cycling is the best single choice for fat loss. Add two strength sessions a week to build muscle.

QUESTION 7 · FAT LOSS

Can I out-exercise a bad diet?

MYTH	I run, so I can eat whatever I like.
FACT	**Exercise has big health benefits, but at recommended amounts it produces only modest weight loss on its own.**[8]

A review in Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases concluded that aerobic exercise programmes in line with public health recommendations may produce up to about 2 kg of weight loss, and that clinically significant loss is unlikely unless the overall volume is very high.[8] The authors also stress that exercise brings many health benefits even without weight loss.[8]

TRY THIS Pair your activity with the food steps in the Stride Nutrition FAQ instead of treating exercise as permission to eat anything.

QUESTION 8 · FAT LOSS

Should I exercise on an empty stomach to burn more fat?

MYTH	Morning cardio before breakfast burns more body fat.
FACT	**Fasted exercise burns more fat during the session, but a review found no meaningful difference in weight loss or body composition afterwards.**[9,10]

A meta-analysis found higher fat oxidation during aerobic exercise in the fasted state than in the fed state.[9] But a systematic review of five studies (96 participants) found no significant difference in body mass, body-fat percentage or lean mass between fasted and fed training.[10] The authors urge caution because there were few studies, and suggest that a meaningful calorie deficit over time matters more than timing.[10]

TRY THIS Train at whatever time you'll actually do it, fed or fasted. If you feel dizzy or weak, eat something first.

CHAPTER 3

The Gym and Building Muscle

QUESTION 9 · GYM & MUSCLE

Do I need heavy weights or a gym to build muscle?

MYTH	Only heavy weights build muscle.
FACT	**A meta-analysis of 21 studies found similar muscle growth with light and heavy loads when sets were taken close to failure. Heavy loads gave greater gains in maximal strength.**[11]

The review compared low-load training (60% of one-repetition maximum or less) with high-load training, all taken to momentary muscular failure for at least six weeks.[11] Changes in muscle size were similar, while maximal strength favoured heavy loads.[11] "Failure" means the last repetitions are genuinely hard, so effort matters as much as the equipment.

TRY THIS At home, use bodyweight moves, resistance bands or a backpack with books, and push until the last few reps feel hard but safe.

QUESTION 10 · GYM & MUSCLE

How much strength training do I need?

MYTH	Strength training is only for bodybuilders and athletes.
FACT	**WHO recommends muscle-strengthening on two or more days a week, and 30–60 minutes a week was linked to a 10–20% lower risk of death and major diseases.**[1,12]

A meta-analysis of 16 cohort studies found muscle-strengthening activities associated with a 10–17% lower risk of death from any cause, cardiovascular disease, total cancer, diabetes and lung cancer, with the biggest benefit at about 30–60 minutes a week.[12] Strength plus aerobic activity was linked to an even lower risk of death.[12] The studies were observational and mostly from the US.[12]

TRY THIS Two sessions a week covering legs, back, chest, shoulders and core is a good start.

QUESTION 11 · GYM & MUSCLE

How do I gain weight as muscle, not just fat?

MYTH	Eat as much as possible and the muscle will follow.
FACT	**Muscle gain needs resistance training, enough protein and a modest calorie surplus, not unlimited eating.**[13,14]

In trials, extra protein boosted strength and muscle size when combined with resistance training, and gains levelled off above about 1.6 g per kg of body weight a day.[13] For gaining weight in general, the NHS suggests adding around 300–500 extra calories a day rather than eating without limit.[14] If you are underweight or have lost weight without trying, see a doctor first.[14]

TRY THIS Lift on at least two days a week, add a nutritious snack or two, and track your weight and strength rather than chasing a fast jump.

CHAPTER 4

Running, Your Mind and Getting Started

QUESTION 12 · RUNNING, MIND & GETTING STARTED

Is running bad for my knees?

MYTH	Running wears out your knees and hips.
FACT	**A meta-analysis of 17 studies (114,829 people) found hip or knee arthritis in 3.5% of recreational runners, compared with 10.2% of non-runners and 13.3% of competitive runners.**[15]

The authors concluded that, in general, running is not associated with osteoarthritis, and that recreational running can be safely recommended as general health exercise.[15] The higher rate in competitive runners suggests that more extreme training may carry more joint risk, and the study could not determine how much running is safe.[15] These were observational findings.

TRY THIS Increase distance gradually, mix running with walking, and get pain that does not settle checked by a clinician.

QUESTION 13 · RUNNING, MIND & GETTING STARTED

How hard should I run as a beginner?

MYTH	If it doesn't hurt, it isn't working.
FACT	**The CDC's talk test: at moderate effort you can talk but not sing. At vigorous effort you can say only a few words without pausing for breath.**[16]

Brisk walking counts as moderate, while jogging or running is vigorous, and one minute of vigorous activity counts about the same as two minutes of moderate.[16] WHO advises starting with small amounts and gradually increasing how often, how hard and how long you go.[1]

TRY THIS Try alternating one minute of jogging with two of brisk walking, and extend the jogging time as it gets easier. Stop and seek help for chest pain, severe breathlessness or dizziness.

QUESTION 14 · RUNNING, MIND & GETTING STARTED

Does exercise help with stress, low mood and anxiety?

MYTH	Exercise is only for your body, not your mind.
FACT	**An overview of 97 reviews covering 1,039 trials and more than 128,000 people found physical activity had medium effects on depression, anxiety and psychological distress.**[17]

Walking, resistance training, yoga and other types of activity were all beneficial, and higher-intensity activity was associated with greater improvements.[17] Most of the included reviews were rated critically low in quality, so treat the size of the effect with some caution.[17] If low mood, anxiety or hopelessness persists, please speak to a doctor or licensed mental-health professional.

TRY THIS A brisk walk, a dance session or a short strength circuit all count as a place to begin.

QUESTION 15 · RUNNING, MIND & GETTING STARTED

I haven't exercised in years. Is it safe to start?

MYTH	I'm too out of shape to start, or I have to start hard.
FACT	**WHO advises starting with small amounts and gradually increasing frequency, intensity and duration. Some activity is better than none.**[1]

WHO notes that at the recommended level of 150 minutes a week of moderate activity, musculoskeletal injury rates appear to be uncommon.[18] Check with a doctor first if you have a heart or lung condition, are pregnant, or take medication that affects heart rate, and stop and seek help for chest pain, severe breathlessness or dizziness.

TRY THIS Begin with about 10 minutes of walking on most days and add a few minutes each week.

A QUICK WORD ON THE EVIDENCE

Many findings in this guide are observational, including those on steps, short bursts, weekend activity, strength training and running: they show strong associations, not proof of cause.[2,3,4,5,12,15] Some trials were small, such as the 24-person abdominal-exercise trial and the five-study fasted-exercise review.[6,10] The mental-health overview pooled many reviews of low quality.[17] The low-versus-high-load result applies to sets taken close to failure.[11] Individual needs differ; if you have a heart or lung condition, are pregnant, or take medication that affects heart rate, check with your doctor before starting.

This guide is for general education and inspiration. It is not medical advice and does not replace care from a licensed clinician. Talk with your healthcare provider before making significant changes to your activity or routines, especially if you are pregnant, managing a health condition, or taking medication.

SOURCES

References & Further Reading

Every number in this guide traces back to the sources below. Superscript numbers in the text match the numbered entries. Where a finding comes from observational research (which shows association, not proof of cause), we say so.

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WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- WHO physical activity fact sheet: who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity
- CDC Physical Activity Basics: cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics
- NHS Live Well, Exercise: nhs.uk/live-well/exercise
- For personal advice before starting, speak to your doctor or a qualified fitness professional.