

# A Guide for making healthier choices

## FOUNDATION STRATEGY # 5 - BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE EVERY DAY!

Every single person, including you, can benefit in countless ways from being physically active every day. But, to keep it short and sweet, in this Foundation Strategy, only the Top 10 are outlined.

Why is regular physical activity so important? Remember from Section 1 the idea that your health is like a foundation - your Health Foundation™ - made up of 4 cornerstones. As a reminder, these cornerstones are:

- Developing a positive mental outlook and attitude towards life.
- Living smoke-free. (and free from the abuse of drugs and alcohol as well).
- Making healthy choices when it comes to the food you eat.
- Being physically active.

“Those who do not find time for exercise will have to find time for illness.”

The Earl of Derby,  
Liverpool, England, 1873.

It's as simple as that! The Earl hit the nail on the head (and that was back in 1873). But the same thing could be said today - a lack of physical activity and exercise in your lifestyle on a daily basis can be very damaging to your health – in fact, many health experts agree that it can be about as bad as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day.

So, if exercise and physical activity are so good for you, **WHY** are people not very physically active these days?

The answer to that question isn't simple, but it might involve some of these things: computers, television, cars, video games and movies. What do all of these things have in common? Well, these are all things that are present in our lives that have contributed to making us less physically active. The way we live today – our transportation, our communication, our education, our entertainment - makes it very easy for us to be sedentary (when you are sedentary, it means that you aren't physically active). Think about it for a few moments. Think of all of the things we do sitting down or things where we don't need to be very active at all. We work, communicate, and play on computers. We communicate by e-mails, chat rooms, cordless phones, and cellular phones. Video games, movies and television entertain us while we sit. We ride around in cars, trucks, buses and taxis to get everywhere we need to go.

Now, many of these modern conveniences have been created to make our lives easier, more convenient, or more fun. Some of them have been created to help us get more things done in a shorter period of time. Although there's nothing wrong with this, our use of many of these things has resulted in us being less and less physically active.

But, you ask, with all these things that make life easier, we don't need to be physically active, right?

**Wrong! Dead wrong!**

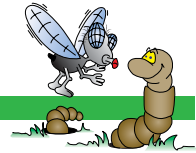
In fact, we need to be physically active because of these things.

It's important to understand exactly what is involved in “physical activity.”

In this Foundation Strategy, physical activity can be divided into 2 main categories:

- 1) Daily activities: These are things that we do as a normal part of our day that require us to be physically active – examples might include things like walking to school or the store, climbing the stairs, walking the dog, or doing other jobs around the house. Many people search for the easiest way to complete

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these daily activities like taking elevators instead of the stairs or parking as close as possible to the entrance of the mall instead of parking a little further away and walking the extra distance.

## Daily Activities:

- Walk to School	- Walk the Dog	- Walk to the store
- Use the stairs	- Get outside	- Help out around the house
- Take a longer route		
- Ride your bike or in-line skate to a friend's house instead of getting a ride		
- Park or get dropped off further away from where you're going so that you have to walk a little further		

2) Planned activities (which are broken down into two parts):

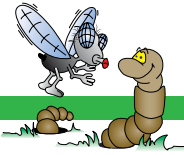
- a) Sports and recreation: The playing and practicing of all sorts of sports or recreation activities require you to be physically active. They range from bowling and baseball to ice hockey to gymnastics to skateboarding to swimming to riding a bike and everything in between. They can be "team sports" (like baseball or hockey) or solitary sports (like track or gymnastics where you may be part of a team but you participate individually). Sports and recreation activities are often planned activities in which your play is governed by a set of rules or requirements.
- b) Fitness and exercise – These types of activities are usually made up of specific exercises that are done for specific reasons. They are often done to help "train" or "get into shape" for participating in a certain sport or event. Fitness and exercise activities are usually planned and structured. They are usually repetitive. Fitness and exercise related activities could include things like weight training, doing aerobics classes, jogging, cycling, and stretching.

## Sports and other activities to try:

- Hiking	- Mountain Biking/bike riding	- Basketball
- Baseball	- Hockey – ice, floor, street or field	- Swimming
- Tennis	- Golf (no carts please)	- Football
- Gymnastics	- Skateboarding	- Martial arts (karate)
- Badminton	- Lacrosse	- Track & Field
- Dance/tap/jazz.	- Weight training/jogging – seek professional help	
- Fitness / Exercise	- seek professional help	
- Squash / Racquetball	- In-line skating	
- Volleyball	- Cross-country skiing	
- Snowshoeing	- Skipping rope	- Frisbee throwing
- Hopscotch	- Outdoor games like tag/hide and seek	
- Ringette	- Canoe / Kayak	- Rowing
- Surfing	- Snowboarding / Downhill skiing	- Rock climbing

**Note:** The authors assume no responsibility concerning participation in any of the above activities. Remember safety first. Get professional help if you don't know what you're doing. Make sure you check with a physician before starting any exercise program or other fitness related activity.

The bottom line is that most people, both young and older, are not very active in any of the types of activities mentioned above. As a result, most people do not receive any of the potential health benefits of being physically active. Here are some points to think about concerning young people between the ages of about 8 to 16 years old:



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- Young people spend 25-30 hours each week sitting at a desk in school
- Young people watch an average of 26 hours of TV per week (an average of just over 3 \_ hours per day) and this doesn't even include all the time spent sitting at a computer or playing video games. (Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance, 1994)
- The majority of schools offer only 1-1/2 hours of physical education per week (about 15 minutes a day, if that).
- Only a small percentage (less than 10%) of young people between the ages of 10 and 19 are active regularly enough or vigorously enough to see any benefit to physical activity.
- Approximately 1 in 3 children are considered obese, and this problem is getting worse

Certainly, these points show that young people are not very physically active. Sure, there are some kids who just don't sit still whether they are playing sports or just simply being on the move. But mostly, there is a trend towards people, young and older, being less and less physically active.

## So, WHY is all this physical activity important?

Here are the Top 10 reasons to exercise and be physically active on a regular basis. They are listed in no certain order. As you read them, try to see if there are some that make sense to you:

**REASON # 1 – Your Health Foundation™** - Exercise and physical activity can help you create a foundation for better overall health. Exercise and physical activity, performed on a regular basis, are one of the four cornerstones of your Health Foundation™. Regular exercise provides many amazing benefits for your health and well-being. It is a fact that people who are active usually develop better overall health habits and personal wellness. As a general rule, healthier and physically fitter people enjoy a better quality of life.

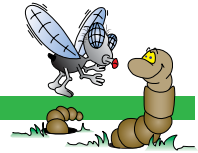
**REASON # 2 – Your stress level and emotional well-being** - Physical activity and exercise can help you deal with the stress in your life more effectively. Everyone has stress; different things stress different people. When you are stressed, taking a break to be physically active or to get some exercise can help take your mind off your problems and help you to relax. In addition, when you are physically fit, your body, and mind, can often deal more easily with the effects of stress. Physical activity and exercise can help to relieve anxiety, depression and tension. When you are physically active or are exercising, it can have a relieving effect on worry, anxiety and depression. This is due in part to “chemical reactions” that occur within your body during exercise and the hormones and other compounds (for example, endorphins, which act as natural “painkillers”) that are released in your body during exercise.

In relation to this, exercise and physical activity can also help to increase your levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. When you exercise, you are doing something good for you; which may help you feel better about yourself.

Exercise impacts on your self-esteem in other ways too. It can help improve your appearance (by making you look healthy and well) and feel good about how you look. Exercise can also help you improve your posture which might mean you will “carry yourself better,” and be more confident about the way you sit, stand, walk and appear to others.

**REASON # 3 – Your future health** - Physical activity and exercise can reduce your risk of developing many different diseases later on in your life including heart disease, high blood pressure, prostate cancer, breast cancer and colon cancer. Even though these diseases are problems that usually affect adults when they become older, it is during your younger years (in other words, right now) that you can work to create a foundation of healthy habits like regular physical activity and exercise that may help prevent these problems later in life.

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**REASON # 4 – Your bones** - Physical activity and exercise, especially activities like walking, running or dancing where you are on your feet, can help to build up the strength of your bones. It does this by helping to make your bones more dense, which makes them stronger. This is extremely important at this point in your life because your bones are growing. Developing strong bones when you are young can mean that your bones will also be stronger later in life. Building your bones when you are younger by being physically active and getting enough calcium (See Foundation Strategy #1 - Choose Calcium Everyday) might help to prevent osteoporosis (a disease where your bones become brittle so that they break more easily).

**REASON # 5 – Your body weight** - Physical activity and exercise, along with a commitment to eating healthier, can help you to achieve and maintain a body weight that is right for you. Everyone's body is a different size, shape, height and weight. Much of how your body will develop depends on your genetics. You can help yourself keep a healthy body weight and level of body fat by eating healthy and being physically active on a regular basis. Remember that a big part of being healthy is allowing your body to grow and develop and reach a weight that is right for you. It doesn't have to look a certain way or uphold a certain image.

**REASON # 6 – Your brain** - Exercise and physical activity can also help to improve your mental focus, concentration and alertness. It might also improve your short-term memory and boost your creativity. Exercise also has a wonderful way of clearing your mind and your thoughts.

**REASON # 7 – Your immunity** - Regular physical activity and exercise can help to boost your immunity, which can help your body resist and fight off colds and flu better. One of the ways that exercise does this is by helping your body to create an energy reserve, which can help to prevent your body from becoming "run down" as easily. Adrenaline is a hormone released into your blood stream when you exercise. It can act like a natural decongestant, which might help make you feel better when you have a head cold. But check with your doctor first before you rush out to work out if you have a cold.

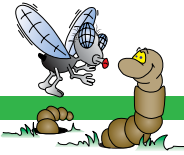
**REASON # 8 – Your energy level and stamina** - Regular physical activity and exercise can help to increase your energy level, stamina, and endurance. Think of this like installing a more powerful battery in your body. Exercise can help prevent that lazy, sluggish, slow, couch potato kind of feeling.

**REASON # 9 – Your heart** - Regular physical activity can help make your heart healthier. Your heart beats at an average rate of approximately 72 beats per minute. That's a lot of beats, when you add up all of the minutes in a day. When you exercise to make your heart healthier, you make it more efficient so that it doesn't have to work as hard to pump blood.

**REASON # 10 – Your quality of life** - Regular physical activity and exercise can help to improve your overall quality of life. By making you healthier, more fit and stronger you will be able to do more of the things you have always wanted to do. You can really live your life to its fullest potential. Sure, sitting a front of a computer surfing the web or playing games or watching TV programs or movies can be fun – but just think of all of the things that you might like to do, see, or try out there in the big, wide world. Just like the ad for a well-known computer software company "Where do you want to go today"? – Well, where do you really want to go and do and live and experience? Think about that! Dream a little. Be adventurous. Get up and be active, get out there and live. And to do that, it will definitely help if you're healthy and fit.

## But, how do you do it?

This section takes a look at some of the barriers or roadblocks that can stand in the way of you becoming more active. In other words, these are some of the most common reasons why people don't do it! This section also gives you some ideas and possible solutions for overcoming these roadblocks (RB's).



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## RB #1 – “I’m too busy to exercise”

Many people seem to lack the time to be physically active because other things occupy their daily lives. Are you spending your time wisely or are you just “wasting” it away?

### SOLUTIONS:

- **DO A TIME CHECK** - Take a close look at how you are spending your time. Sure, there are things you do every day that you just simply have to do – like shower, get dressed, eat, go to school and sleep. But, how much time do you spend each day doing things that you don’t absolutely have to do – like watching TV, talking on the phone, chatting with friends? Can you find 20 minutes sometime during the day that you could set aside for some kind of physical activity? Could you use those 20 minutes to do something like going for a walk, or putting on your favorite songs and dancing your butt off? If you really think about it, you probably do have the time to be active; it’s just hidden in your day somewhere by all of the other things you feel you just have to do.
- **BUILD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INTO YOUR DAY** – There are simple things you can do each day that can help you be a little more physically active without really having to invest a lot of time. For example, take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator. Walk to school instead of getting a ride. Take your dog for a walk each day. If you take a close look at your day and how you spend your time, you may discover that there are ways for you to build a little physical activity into your day without it really needing to take up a big chunk of the time you have.

## RB # 2 – “It’s too cold out”, “It’s raining”, It’s not safe in my neighbourhood”

### SOLUTIONS

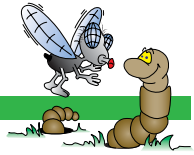
There may be clubs or organizations in your neighborhood – for example, a YMCA, or Boys and Girls Club – that have space and equipment for you to use.

Problems like weather and safety are a bit harder to solve. Again, if being outside (where there’s more space) is a problem because of weather or safety, then you may need to look elsewhere for opportunities to be active – check out local clubs, organizations, recreation centers, fitness centers, community centers, churches, schools or other facilities.

## RB # 3 – “I don’t have the right equipment” or “I don’t live near a gym or other facility”

### SOLUTIONS:

Sometimes, the solution here requires a little homework and investigation. To be physically active, you need some space. If space at home is limited, perhaps you could look in other places - school, a nearby park, playground or community center – to see if there is space there. As for equipment, you don’t need much. You can go for a walk with nothing but the shoes on your feet. Borrow some sports equipment from a friend or neighbour. Sometimes local community centers (or even your school) have equipment that you could use, borrow or sign out. Ask!



**RB # 4 – “I could never do that.”  
“I’m too uncoordinated / clumsy / fat. People will laugh at me.”**

**SOLUTIONS:**

- Choose an activity you like to do – you’ll be more likely to participate.
- Seek out other people who enjoy doing the same activity as you. Maybe there’s a team, league or club of some kind that you could join. This might make you feel more at ease to know there are others who like doing the same things as you; not to mention that it’s also a great way to meet new friends!
- Remember that other people you see who are doing the activity had to learn it at first, too, and they were probably uncoordinated or clumsy when they started. It might take some time for you to learn. Ask for their help.
- Don’t be afraid. Ask yourself, “What’s the worst thing that could happen if I try this new activity?” Have courage. Try that new activity even though you might be a little scared at first.
- Keep your sense of humor – Maybe you will look a bit goofy at first, but don’t take it so seriously. Laugh at yourself.
- Keep on trying – How do you know you won’t like a certain activity or be good at it unless you try? Sure, you may not pick up the activity or learn the skills right away – but don’t give up, keep on trying.

**RB # 5 – “I don’t know how.”**

**SOLUTIONS:**

- Educate yourself. Take a look in your school or community library or over the Internet for information on how to do the activity you have chosen.
- Ask for help. Ask someone who already knows how, if they’ll help you too.
- Take lessons. A qualified instructor can help get you started on the right foot.
- Watch and learn. If you watch a sport or other activity carefully, it might help you to figure out how to play it.

**RB # 6 – “I had to try it when I was little, and I hated it.”**

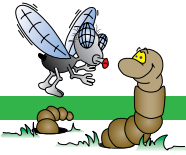
**SOLUTIONS:**

Well, you can’t go back and “undo” that bad experience. That’s history. However, maybe you can learn from that bad experience and go forward with a more positive outlook. Ask yourself some questions: Did the bad experience happen because you weren’t having fun? Were you taking the activity too seriously? Was someone else (parents, coaches) pushing you too much? Did you forget to have fun? Although these kinds of situations from the past might be something, you’d rather forget, try to think of how the activity made you feel when you first did it – before it wasn’t fun anymore. Fun is what it’s all about. Maybe you just need to try it again – this time without all the added pressure. You might just be able to re-discover how much you really love doing that activity again. Only this time, focus on having fun and don’t let yourself, or anyone else, try to put that pressure on you.

**RB # 7 – “None of my friends exercise.”**

**SOLUTIONS:**

Of all of the roadblocks so far, this one can be one of the toughest to deal with. Take a look at some of the physical activities your friends do – do any of them seem interesting and fun to you? If so, then you have a place to start. Friends always seem to make things more fun.



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However, if you and your friends are not that active, then here are a few suggestions:

- Talk to your friends and tell them you are interested in trying a new activity and you were wondering if they wanted to join you. You might be able to learn together and begin participating together. Again, physical activity is always more fun with a friend.
- Organize a group of your friends and do some type of physical activity together. Perhaps something as basic as walking to school together or playing a game of pick-up basketball after school. The group doesn't have to be anything formal, just a bunch of friends who want to do something together that's healthy and physically active.
- Be open to the idea of making new friends who want to be active and do the kinds of things you like to do. This doesn't mean you have to give up your old friends; you're only expanding your circle of friends.

## **RB # 8 – “No one in my family exercises.”**

### **SOLUTIONS:**

If you want to be active, then talk it over with your family. Let them know that you want to try a new activity. Who knows, maybe your family will even catch the physical activity “bug” from you! Sometimes, your family will have concerns over safety, time commitment, expense or cost, equipment needed and some of the other things you may need to start a new activity. Some of these concerns may not seem important to you. Try to consider your family's feelings here and work with them, not against them.

## **RB # 9 – “I'm not in the habit of exercising.”**

### **SOLUTIONS**

- It takes energy to make energy – in order to become more active, it takes an investment of energy. The first step to being more active is to literally take that first step. Start today – invest a little energy and do something active. It takes energy to make energy. Once you've made that first step, you're moving and the next step becomes easier. It's just that the first step is usually the hardest.
- “Don't bite off more than you can chew” – you might have heard this old saying before. As mentioned, becoming more active means making changes to the way you go about things each day. Sometimes, people will try to make too many changes all at once, which can be a little overwhelming. Make small changes at first and let yourself get used to your new way of doing things. Try to become even just a little more active than you are now. Even a little bit is better than nothing at all.
- Develop a support system. Tell friends, parents or other people who are part of your support system. Tell these people about your new activity and ask them to help you keep it up. Better yet, ask them to join you!

## **RB # 10 – “There's nothing around here I like to do.”**

### **SOLUTIONS:**

- Make a suggestion. Talk to your teachers or the leaders at your community center and make a suggestion about starting a new activity that isn't available right now.
- Look for others that feel the same way. If you want to get a new activity started at your school, you may have to be the leader and find other people who will want to participate as well. Talk to a teacher or other school leader and ask for their help. They might be able to suggest ways that you could start a new activity club or team. You might need to do some advertising or asking around. Be a leader. It never hurts to ask!

## **Choose Health – Be Physically Active Every Day!**