

Physical Activity for Health

Today, non-communicable diseases (NCD) such as cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases represent a leading threat to human health and development. Similar to many countries and regions, Hong Kong is facing an imminent threat of NCD with increasing mortality, morbidity and disability. Of more than 50,000 registered deaths in 2023, the four major NCD accounted for about 51% of the total deaths. Fortunately, a growing body of evidence shows that the leading causes and underlying risk factors for NCD can be effectively tackled through population-based interventions that promote healthy living, including healthy eating, regular physical activity, no smoking and reduced consumption of alcohol.

On 4th May 2018, the Government launched “Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong” (SAP). Among the nine local targets to be achieved by 2025, Target 3 sets a 10% relative reduction in the prevalence of insufficient physical activity among adolescents and adults by 2025. For more details of Target 3, please refer to the SAP website which can be accessed at: <https://www.change4health.gov.hk/en/saptowards2025/target3.html>

Physical inactivity is one of the leading behavioural risk factors for NCD. According to the “Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health” published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2010, physical inactivity contributed to approximately 21–25% of breast and colon cancers, 27% of diabetes and approximately 30% of ischaemic heart disease globally. Physical activity is defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure – including activities undertaken during class and work, carrying out household chores, travelling or engaging in recreational pursuits, of which has a broader scope than “sport” and “exercise”. In 2020, WHO updated the previous recommendations and released the “WHO Guidelines on Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour”. As recommended, children and adolescents aged 5-17 should do at least an average of 60 minutes per day of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity (mostly aerobic) across the week. For adults, they should do at least 150-300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity or an equivalent amount of physical activity throughout the week. For information about the classification of physical activity and level of intensity, please refer to the SAP website which can be accessed at https://www.change4health.gov.hk/en/physical_activity/facts/classification/index.html.

Engaging in high levels and intensities of physical activity since childhood and continuing into adult years will bring many health benefits, including increased physical fitness (both cardiorespiratory endurance and muscular strength), reduced body fatness, cut cardiovascular and metabolic disease risks, improved bone health, as well as reduced symptoms of depression. Physical activity also promotes self-esteem, builds resilience, boosts self-confidence, and promotes teamwork and social interaction.

Physical activity promoters and organisations are good partners of health sectors. Together we can assist the public to develop an active lifestyle and combat NCD!