

Resolving to move more and move better

Happy New Year! If you've resolved to live healthier in 2017, you're not alone. According to a December 2015 Ipsos poll, the most common intention set by Canadians when beginning a new year is "living a healthier lifestyle." Plenty of steps can be taken in pursuit of this important goal. Steps such as eating healthier, quitting smoking, thinking more positively, and spending more time with loved ones. However, the step I want to focus on is the one that says, "I will strive to be more physically active." This step means a lot to me both personally and professionally.

Research shows that physical activity has a direct and positive impact on our physical, emotional, and mental health. Physical activity can boost immune systems, prolong independence, enable bone strength, support heart health, and improve core muscles needed to bend and sit for long periods. There is also evidence that physical activity can help prevent and treat mild and moderate forms of depression. In children, physical activity enables better concentration and supports improved academic results. And these are just some of its benefits.

If you are wondering how much activity you need, the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines provide an age specific breakdown of the recommended amounts of daily physical activity. These guidelines are a helpful resource in identifying what to strive toward. Another helpful resource is a health care professional who can help you apply the guidelines based on your specific needs and circumstances.

As a physiotherapist, I witness the positive difference physical activity can make to someone's life. I also see what happens when people push themselves too far or initiate a program without aligning their physical activity goals with what their bodies can actually do. People often seek physiotherapy services after they've been injured or start to experience discomfort. However, we are also trained to help prevent injury. If you are looking to begin 2017 by striving to be more physically active, here are some tips to consider:

1. Include a five to ten minute warm up and cool down in your workout.
2. Begin based on your current fitness level. If you want to exercise for 30 minutes but are only fit enough for 10, begin with 10. This will help you reach your goal without injury or frustration.
3. Add exercises, daily amounts, or intensity slowly. Progressing too quickly can lead to injury.
4. If you have any health concerns or if exercise causes pain that won't go away, consult a health care professional such as a physician or physiotherapist.

You don't have to train for a marathon or be the fastest swimmer in the pool in order to reap the benefits of physical activity. You just have to keep moving – in a way that's right for you.

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