

Evidence-Based Tips to Get You Active!

Physical activity provides a range of physical¹ and mental² health benefits that could be particularly valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, only 16% of Canadian adults meet Canada's physical activity guidelines³. New demands at work and home, added stress, and the public health restrictions and closures associated with the pandemic have created additional challenges to being physically active. SIRC turned to research to see what could help.

TIPS FOR GETTING ACTIVE

According to the evidence⁴, the following behavior change techniques are the most effective in helping individuals increase their levels of physical activity, especially when used together:

► **SET A GOAL:** Set physical activity goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-oriented (S.M.A.R.T.). An example of a S.M.A.R.T. goal might be to walk for 30 minutes on 5 or more days of the week. For best results, goals should be self-generated and focus on a type and amount of physical activity, rather than an outcome of being physically active (e.g. losing weight).

► **CREATE AN ACTION PLAN:** Create a detailed plan for when, where and how to achieve each physical activity goal. For example, a goal of walking for 30 minutes on 5 or more days of the week might involve a plan to walk on weekday mornings before work on a local trail or path, or simply around the neighbourhood. Having a walking partner – such as a family member, neighbour or pet – can help you stick to the plan, and provide some valuable social time, too!

► **TRACK IT:** Establish a way to track your physical activity so progress towards your goals is easy to see. Use a journal to record the date, time of day and duration of activity, or go high-tech and use a pedometer, smartwatch, smartphone or GPS device to record the step count, minutes or distance covered.

► **GET FEEDBACK:** Seek feedback from a health or fitness professional, such as a health counsellor, physician or personal trainer, or even from friends and family members. Positive feedback from others,

including support and encouragement, can increase self-confidence and help motivate you to achieve your goals. Use constructive feedback with specific suggestions for improvement to improve goal-related skills (e.g. physical technique, time management), or to modify goals and action plans.

► **REVIEW YOUR GOALS:** Review your physical activity goals on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to celebrate progress, increase the challenge (e.g. increasing the time or distance), or adjust expectations (too aspirational? Reset your goal and start again!). At the same time, consider how your action plan, tracking strategy, or source of feedback can be adapted to optimize your success.

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2 Rebar, A. L., Stanton, R., Geard, D., Short, C., Duncan, M. J., & Vandelanotte, C. (2015); Wiese, C. W., Kuykendall, L., & Tay, L. (2018).

3 Clarke, J., Colley, R., Janssen, I., & Tremblay, M. S. (2019).

4 Ashford, S., Edmunds, J., & French, D. P. (2010); Greaves, C. J., Sheppard, K. E., Abraham, C., Hardeman, W., Roden, M., Evans, P. H., & Schwarz, P. (2011); McEwan, D., Harden, S. M., Zumbo, B. D., Sylvester, B. D., Kaulius, M., Ruissen, G. R., ... & Beauchamp, M. R. (2016); Michie, S., Abraham, C., Whittington, C., McAtteer, J., & Gupta, S. (2009); Murray, J. M., Brennan, S. F., French, D. P., Patterson, C. C., Kee, F., & Hunter, R. F. (2017); Williams, S. L., & French, D. P. (2011).