



Physical activity during winter and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the interconnectedness and importance of physical, mental, and emotional health. For example, we now understand that the severity of COVID-19 related illness and health outcomes is influenced by factors such as age and underlying health conditions (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Adopting healthy lifestyle behaviours such as being physically active and good nutrition helps prevent chronic health conditions that are associated with severe COVID-related illness (e.g., Willett et al., 2006). As we experience the second wave of COVID-19 and with the winter season approaching, starting or maintaining any type of physical activity is essential to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples' health and well-being.

Benefits of physical activity include improved sleep, memory, attention, and learning, as well as physical and mental resilience (e.g., Kline, 2014). With cold weather, ice, and snow outdoors and public health measures such as physical distancing and gym/fitness facility closures in place in many areas, it can seem difficult to stay active through these upcoming months. However, there are lots of easy and inexpensive ways to get moving in safe and fun ways, even when there may be limited space and exercise equipment.

Individuals with underlying health conditions should talk to their doctor or other healthcare professional before starting any physical activity routine.

Some ideas and resources for individuals of all ages include:

- Free online classes: the YMCA offers virtual workout programs for all ages from the early years to children, adults and families through their YThrive Home video series. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnMjjYuiaJZT7JilnXPo7jQ>
- Indoor mall walking: many malls offer free walking clubs that operate in the morning before stores open. This accessible physical activity option offers features including free parking, a safe and climate-controlled environment, indoor washroom facilities and maps of walking routes.
- Exercise DVDs: check out a yoga, Pilates, or other exercise DVD from your local public library. In addition to this suggestion from their website, the Heart and Stroke Foundation has ideas for ways to stay active in winter: <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/articles/11-ways-to-stay-active-in-winter>
- ParticipACTION has published several resources including ideas for activities that can be done at home, such as stair climbing, yoga, at-home workouts, and more. Resources are located online at: <https://www.participaction.com/en-ca/blog/15-ways-for-you--your-family-to-stay-active-at-home> <https://www.participaction.com/en-ca/blog/why-getting-active-outside-is-key-to-your-physical--mental-wellbeing>

Indigenous-specific activities include traditional dances, outdoor activities, and games. Some examples are found online at:

- Practicing traditional First Nations, Inuit and Métis dancing:

<https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2020/usask-researcher-and-m%C3%A9tis-partners-collaborate-to-jig-away-cardiac-woes.php>

<http://www.inuktitube.com/ibS6URrwnRQ>

- Traditional Inuit games:
<http://workingitouttogether.com/content/fun-101-inuit-games/>
- The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) offers a resource sheet for parents containing ideas for children’s physical activity including active play, hide-and-seek, and treasure hunts. Find the resource at: <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-Keeping-Kids-Active-During-the-Pandemic.pdf>

Elder populations may or may not experience mobility or health-related challenges to getting physically active (e.g., arthritis; seeing or hearing difficulties). Additional resources for senior adults include:

- Government of British Columbia Move for Life: DVD featuring seniors of all abilities demonstrating physical activities including suggestions for individuals experiencing mobility challenges in order to safely engage in physical activity. For additional information and to request a free copy of the DVD, please see: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/seniors/health-safety/active-aging/move-for-life-dvd>
- University of British Columbia – School of Kinesiology: The goal of the GrOup-based physical Activity for oLder adults (GOAL) Trial study was to “test group-based physical activity programs for older adults at three YMCA locations in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia” to increase physical activity in this population (GOAL Trial, n.d.). Between 2014-2015 nearly 600 adults aged 65 and older participated in three-times weekly exercise sessions led by trained instructors. A series of instructional videos are available on the study’s website: <http://goal.kin.educ.ubc.ca/videos>

References

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