

Turn small moves into big health gains

MODERN conveniences have resulted in increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Prolonged hours at work and traffic congestion restrict mobility, making it difficult to remain active.

The rise in non-communicable diseases such as obesity, diabetes and hypertension is becoming a pressing concern.

Environmental factors also influence activity levels, points out Universiti Putra says Professor Dr Soh Kim Geok from the Department of Sports Studies, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia.

"Our hot, humid climate often discourages outdoor exercise, and urban infrastructure does not always support walking and cycling."

Many residential areas also lack safe pedestrian walkways, and limited green spaces reduce opportunities for recreational activities. However, small adjustments to daily routines can significantly enhance physical well-being.

"As the population ages, staying active is essential for maintaining independence and overall health," says Soh.



Children need regular physical activity to support their growth and development. PICTURE CREDIT: PCH.VECTOR — FREEPIK

Strength training, balance exercises, brisk walking in parks and swimming can help prevent falls, fractures and chronic diseases.

Expanding community programmes such as tai chi sessions or light aerobics at local community halls, gardens

and parks can provide elderly individuals with accessible ways to stay active while fostering social connections.

AT WORK

Office workers, meanwhile, frequently spend long hours at their desks, which can result in weight gain, cardiovascular problems and musculoskeletal discomfort.

Soh says employers should encourage workplace wellness initiatives, such as standing desks and meetings, active breaks, and stair-climbing challenges. Simple habits like stretching, walking to a colleague's desk instead of sending a message, or taking short walks during breaks can enhance circulation and energy levels.

Organisations could also introduce incentives for employees who meet daily step targets.

The same applies to students. With increased technology use, students

spend extended hours sitting in classrooms or studying. Prolonged screen time contributes to poor posture and fatigue.

Soh says schools should integrate movement into learning by incorporating short, active breaks and promoting sports. Encouraging students to walk, cycle or play traditional games such as 'sepak takraw' can lead to the development of lifelong healthy habits.

START YOUNG

Children need regular physical activity to support their growth and development. However, the increasing popularity of digital devices has reduced outdoor playtime.

Traditional games like 'galah panjang' and 'aci bulat', cycling in neighbourhood parks, or participating in school sports can make exercise enjoyable once again, says Soh.

Parents should prioritise physical

activity by organising weekend family sporting activities, visiting parks, or setting up friendly competitions to help children achieve the recommended 12,500 daily steps. Adults, meanwhile, should target at least 10,000 steps a day.

ACTIVE AT HOME

Homemakers engage in numerous physical activities while managing household responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning and childcare. These tasks involve functional movements that contribute to fitness.

Activities like sweeping, mopping and walking through wet markets, for example, help build strength and endurance.

Community-based fitness groups, such as zumba or aerobics classes at residential halls and community centres, also offer structured opportunities to stay active while socialising.

"It is essential to create more opportunities for movement in daily life. Urban planning should prioritise pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, such as well-maintained sidewalks, bike lanes and accessible parks."

Improved connectivity between residential areas and public transport stations would also encourage more people to walk. Shopping malls, a popular destination for families, could introduce walking trails, step count challenges, or fitness zones to promote movement while running errands.

"Increasing physical activity through structured workouts or minor daily adjustments can significantly boost overall wellbeing."

Physical activity is not just for athletes or fitness enthusiasts; it is essential for everyone, stresses Soh.

By incorporating movement into everyday routines — whether at work, school or home — individuals can improve their quality of life and reduce the risk of lifestyle-related diseases.

meera@nst.com.my



There are many ways to incorporate movement into daily life. PICTURE CREDIT: FREEPIK