



## WHY AREN'T WE MORE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE? LET'S GET MOVING!

Times have changed...a lot!

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1905

2005

<p><b>Anne in 1905</b></p> <p>Anne grew up on a farm. A typical day started early in the morning, feeding the chickens before walking a mile to school.</p> <p>While Anne's father worked in the fields, her mother spent the day cooking and doing laundry in a wringer washer, bending and lifting often.</p>	<p><b>Anne's granddaughter, Joan, in 2005</b></p> <p>Anne's granddaughter, Joan, drives her kids to school, then heads off to work, where she takes the elevator to her fifth-floor office. She works on the computer or meets with clients, then stops at the grocery store to pick up a loaf of bread.</p> <p>After dinner, Joan starts a load of laundry and sits down to watch some TV while the kids finish their homework on the computer.</p>
<p><b>Meeka in 1905</b></p> <p>Meeka's family lived on the land in tents. Meeka would take her baby brother Juda on her back while her mother stretched caribou hides for making clothes and Kammiks (boots). Her father would walk the land for days, hunting caribou, to provide the family with food and skins for clothing.</p> <p>Often Meeka's family would play music and dance for fun and warmth.</p>	<p><b>Meeka's granddaughter, Mary, in 2005</b></p> <p>Meeka's great granddaughter, Mary, lives in a house just outside of town. She rides to school by truck in the summer and by snowmobile in winter. Her dad also drives to work, where he spends most of his day on the telephone.</p> <p>Mary helps make supper, taking the salad out of the bag while waiting for the microwave to reheat the roast. In the evening, she does her homework on the computer and watches music videos on TV.</p>

These stories are based on real experiences to show how much daily life has changed over a century. We have gained a lot through modern technology, but have also lost a lot. We can now do many of our daily tasks more quickly and with less physical effort than in the past. What we have lost is a physically active lifestyle that benefits us by protecting and improving our health.

Interestingly, some communities, such as the Old Order Amish in southern Ontario, have retained a more traditional lifestyle, using manual labour instead of modern technology. These communities have a lower rate of overweight and obesity.

## Reality check: a few facts about physical inactivity

- Most (51%) adult Canadians are inactive (Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute, 2004). Inactivity contributes to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, and depression. People who are regularly physically active are less likely than inactive people to develop health problems.
- Most adults strongly agree that being active regularly has health benefits (such as preventing heart disease, reducing stress and staying independent as you get older) (Beliefs about the benefits of physical activity, Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute, 2002).

## Since we know that being physically active is good for us, why aren't we doing it every day?

Here are some of the most popular reasons people give for not being active:

### "I don't have the time"

Canadians say that a "lack of time" is the number one reason they are not physically active. In fact, we have a lot more time than our grandparents did. The difference is how we choose to use our time. Watching TV is Canada's most popular leisure activity. In 2002, the average weekly television viewing time for Canadians over the age of 2 was almost 22 hours per week (Television viewing, Statistics Canada 2004).

### "I don't have the energy or the motivation"

The second reason for inactivity is that Canadians think it is "too hard" and that physical activity requires too much effort and energy. Some people may have the idea that being active means that you need to go to the gym, join an exercise class or that you have to work so hard that you sweat and get out of breath.

Another reality is that many people have jobs that require them to sit for much of the day. The layout of our towns or neighbourhoods and living in colder regions of the country can also affect how motivated we are to be active. Icy sidewalks, smog alerts, busy streets or a lack of crosswalks can make it difficult or unsafe for us to walk or bike to work and school, run errands or just enjoy an evening stroll.

## Small steps to get into the active groove

So how can you be more active every day?

Try finding ways to fit a bit more physical activity into your normal routine. For example, let's take the statistic that the average Canadian watches almost 22 hours of TV per week.

- **Reduce your weekly TV watching time by 30 minutes**, five days a week, and go for a brisk walk instead. This would help you meet the physical activity recommendations in Canada's Physical Activity Guide and still leave you with 19.5 hours of TV-watching time!
- **Make the time in front of the TV more active.** Instead of lying on the couch, sit on a fitness ball to exercise your back and stomach muscles while you watch your favourite show. Stand up during ads and do some simple stretches or zip downstairs to start a load of laundry (yes, housework counts as physical activity!).
- If you're just starting to be active, **add short physical activity sessions to your normal routine.** If you can't fit in 30 minutes at one time, three ten-minute bouts of activity is a good start.

## Healthy lifestyle of Old Order Amish communities

*From an activity standpoint, the lifestyle of Old Order Amish communities in southern Ontario is similar to the lifestyle of rural Canadians in the early 1900s.*

*They practice traditional farming and do not use gas-powered transportation, electricity and other modern conveniences. The most common way to get from one place to another is by walking.*

More facts about Old Order Amish:

- Only 4% of Old Order Amish adults are obese and 26% are overweight. In contrast, 15% per cent of Canadian adults are obese and 47% are overweight.
- Amish adults do an average of 7.5 hours of vigorous physical activity per week and 30 hours of moderate physical activity.
- Old Order Amish adults typically walk 12 hours per week, an average of 14,000 to 18,000 steps per day

*Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise. 2004; 36: 79-85*

As you can see, fitting physical activity into your life doesn't have to mean huge changes to your daily routine.

### Challenge yourself to keep moving!

Over time, gradually increase the amount of time (duration), number of days per week (frequency) and amount of effort you put into being active (intensity). Try different activities to keep you motivated.

Be creative and have fun while being active:

- **Be a tourist in your city.** Take a walk through your local art gallery, museum, science centre or aquarium. Some cities offer historical walking tours—why not join one?
- **Do it for the money!** Deliver the community newspaper or be a dog walker in your neighbourhood. You'll get a regular 30-minute walk—rain, snow or shine. The bonus: you save on a gym membership, and you get paid to be active!
- **Get close to nature.** Want to know more about the plants and animals in your area? Contact your local nature society, bird club, mushroom club or botanical garden. You can sign up for nature walks and learn something new while being active.
- **Do it for the food!** Pick your own berries or other fruits and vegetables. Bake your own bread or make home-made pasta. It's a fun way to work out and the rewards are delicious!
- **Share your traditional skills and knowledge.** For example, in aboriginal communities, teach the youth in your community how to build Kamatiks (long sleds used to transport supplies), hunt and prepare skins. Demonstrate a traditional dance or sport at your school or community's multicultural day.
- **Be an active living detective!** Scout out opportunities for, and barriers to, physical activity in your community or workplace. Praise your local Chamber of Commerce for existing opportunities to be active. Try to make your workplace more active (e.g., better lighting in the parking lot would make it safer to park farther away from the building).

**Just remember: the human body was designed to be active—every day!**

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*This article was prepared by the [Alberta Centre for Active Living](#).*

*It can be found at [www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/chn/feature-articles/](http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/chn/feature-articles/).*

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### There are many ways and reasons to be active

Visit the [Alberta Centre for Active Living's FAQ collection](#) for information on:

- *active living for weight control and conditions such as diabetes,*
- *how to make your community or workplace more friendly to active living,*
- *how to stay safe while being active.*

### More ways to stay active

*Join a walking club! Walk or wheel your community, province or country. You'll meet people and discover neighbourhoods and historical sites at very little or no cost.*

- *If you use a mobility device, find accessible trails through your local parks and recreation association or leisure guide.*
- *Leave the car at home and try human power instead!*