



The Royal College of  
**Chiropractors**

PUBLIC HEALTH SOCIETY

# Focus on Public Health:

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# Physical Activity



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# Focus on Public Health: Physical Activity

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## Contents

4 Introduction: A Background to Physical Activity

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7 How Can Chiropractors Help?

---

9 Educational Resources for Chiropractors

---

13 Educational Resources for Patients

---

16 References

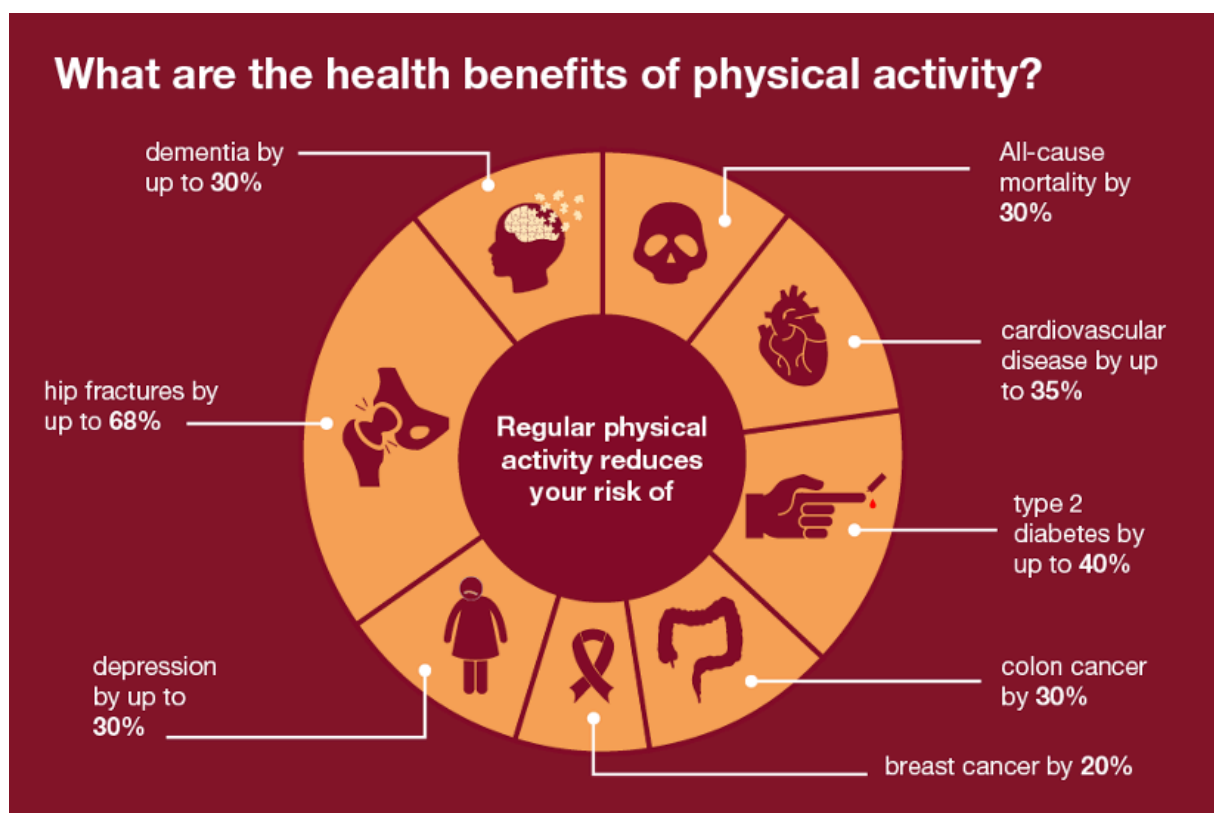
# Introduction

## A Background to Physical Activity

The effects of physical activity (PA) are extensive, directly contributing to increased quality of life through improved weight management, sleep quality, cognitive ability, self-esteem, mood, energy and bone and musculoskeletal health. PA reduces the risk of over 20 chronic conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, breast & colon cancer, hypertension, obesity, cognitive decline, dementia, stress, falls, depression and osteoarthritis (1).

## The current situation

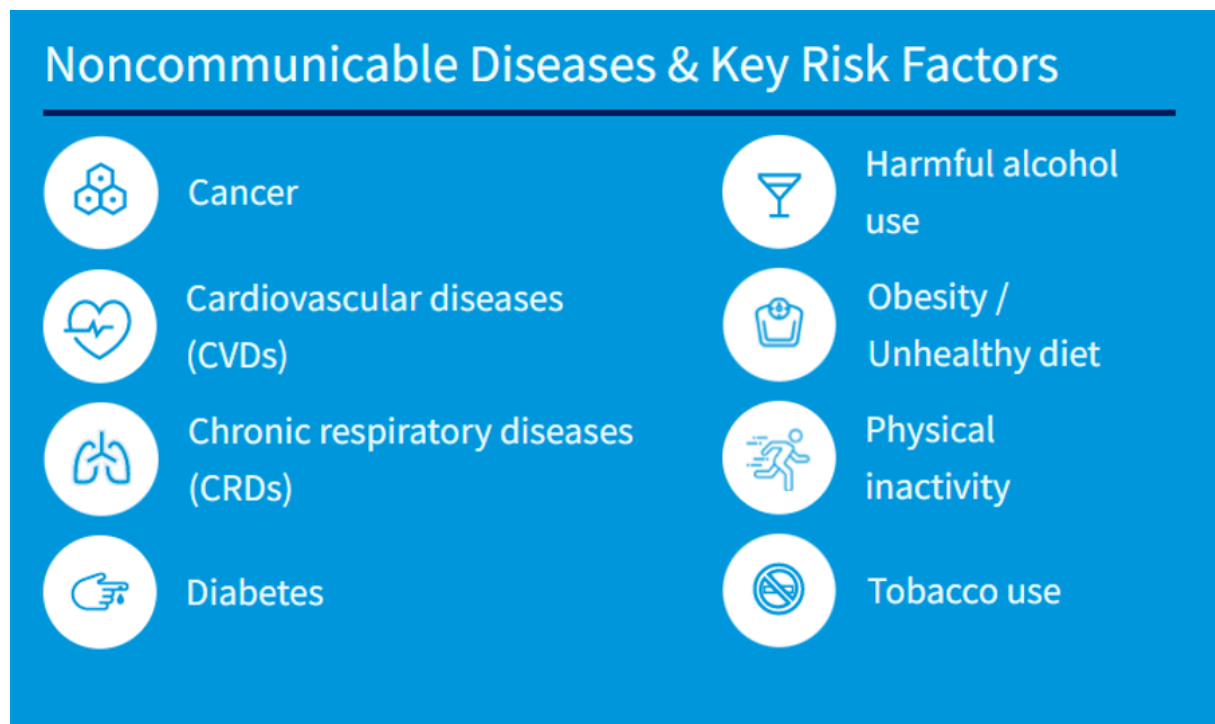
Despite the benefits, PA levels have been on the decline for several years. In the UK adults are 20% less active than they were in the 1960s, a trend set to increase to 35% by 2030. The Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (2) reported 1 in 4 adults, and 3 in 4 adolescents (aged 11–17 years) are not currently meeting the global recommendations for PA set by the World Health Organisation. Further studies have found that people have a poor understanding the health benefits and recommended guidelines of how much PA is good for you (3).



Source: UK Government

## Physical Inactivity: A public health issue

Physical inactivity has become one of the most recognised and prevalent public health issues globally with direct implications on population health, quality of life and economics. The decline in PA levels has played a major role in the increased prevalence of NCDs which account for 88% of all deaths in the UK (22% occurring in people under 70 years of age) of which 1 in 6 are directly attributable to physical inactivity (4). Physical inactivity is now universally accepted as one of 4 major modifiable behavioural risk factors alongside smoking, alcohol and diet (5).



Source: World Health Organisation

## The economic burden

The economic burden of physical inactivity is large, accounting for 70% of all healthcare expenditure globally and an estimated £7.4 billion annually in the UK, treating largely preventable disease (2).

## Physical Activity Initiatives

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognised the promotion of physical activity as a public health priority and in 2018 launched the Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030 [GAPPA(6)]. GAPPA is a global evidence-based policy recommendation which is intended to be implemented nationally, with a multi-sectoral, whole-systems approach to reduce barriers to PA and provide more

opportunities within communities for people to access PA. Interventions such as safer crossing for pedestrians and cyclists, wearable fitness devices and pedestrianising residential streets are examples of GAPPA. An overarching aim of addressing physical activity at such a level is to increase PA levels globally by 15%, improve population health and help deliver many of the Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 2030, including SDG 3 (7).

In the WHO Global Status Report on Physical Activity (1), criticism over the slow uptake and implementation of the policy has been attributed to operational barriers. The 2025 goals, at the current rate, will not be met and there is urgency to scale up policy implementation at all levels. The role of the chiropractor as a primary healthcare practitioner is therefore paramount as a frontline public health practitioner engaging in activities such as recording baseline characteristics, referring, educating patients on current guidelines, signposting and health promotion activities.

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***"If physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure, due to the great many illnesses it can prevent and help treat."***

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Physical activity has been described as a 'best buy' in helping people live a healthier life. In the UK Chief Medical Officers' (CMOs) physical activity guidelines launched in September 2019 (8) the CMOs reiterated a clear message: "If physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure, due to the great many illnesses it can prevent and help treat."

# How can Chiropractors help?

## Do chiropractors address physical activity with their patients?

A recent systematic review into physical activity promotion in chiropractic reported that approximately 90% of chiropractors promote physical activity with their patients (9). This includes discussing physical activity as part of care plans, providing reading material in waiting rooms, prescribing specific exercises or engaging in physical activity counselling. Chiropractors appear to feel very confident in their ability to do this, with an average of 91% feeling prepared or very prepared to counsel their patients on physical activity. This high percentage of engagement from chiropractors may be related to their role as primary healthcare practitioners and the close links between musculoskeletal health and physical health.

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***Approximately 90% of chiropractors are in favour of promoting physical activity.***

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Over 85% of chiropractors also gather information on physical activity from their patients, although it is not clear exactly what type of information is being collected. Assessment of physical activity levels can take many forms, from informal questioning about levels of activity to more formal assessments, such as the General Practice Physical Activity Questionnaire [GPPAQ(10)]. Measuring a patient's

physical activity levels using a more formal assessment would allow it to be compared with the WHO physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines and may be worthy of exploring within a chiropractic setting.

There is clearly an appetite amongst chiropractors for promoting physical activity, which is reflected in the greater public health sphere. The World Federation of Chiropractic encourages chiropractors to participate in health promotion activities, such as nutrition and physical activity (11). The WHO also recognises the importance of primary care providers (6), with strong evidence suggesting that physical activity promotion in primary care settings, such as by chiropractors, helps to increase participation in physical activity (12). Literature suggests it is particularly successful if the clinician regularly engages the patient about physical activity, if the clinician is knowledgeable about physical activity, and if they have a positive attitude towards it (13, 14).

Given these findings, chiropractors should continue to be encouraged to measure and advise on patients' activity levels where appropriate. As a profession, chiropractors are well positioned to take an active part in promoting physical activity at their practice. The nature of chiropractic practice means there are often repeat patient-clinician interactions, which helps to build up a rapport and trust with patients, enabling such topics can be discussed. The importance of physical activity in musculoskeletal health also opens another avenue for chiropractors to address physical

activity with their patients. Interactions on physical activity can be as simple as starting a conversation about a patient's physical health, asking them about their active hobbies, or advocating the benefits of an active lifestyle. Physical activity is part of the Making Every Contact Count initiative (15), which shows how these such small interactions can support people to make positive changes in their physical and mental health.



# Educational resources for chiropractors

## All Our Health

All Our Health is the current Government framework to guide healthcare professionals in preventing illness, protecting health and promoting well-being.

[Access here](#)

*“Health and care practitioners are amongst the most trusted members of our community, privileged to have millions of contacts with the population every day and shape and deliver services at the front line, so your work to prevent as well as treat ill health is absolutely crucial.” (2)*

## Physical Activity: applying All Our Health

‘One in four people would be more active if advised by a healthcare professional so this presents a unique opportunity for you to support people to be more active.’

[Access here](#)

This is the section of the All Our Health framework relating to Physical Activity and is aimed at healthcare professionals. It has plenty of useful links for further information and sources, including a helpful Impact Pathway flowchart for use in clinical practice, produced by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH):

[Access here](#)

Chiropractors may also want to look at the section on MSK Health:

[Access here](#)

## For Healthcare Professionals

### Moving Healthcare Professionals

[Access here](#)

Moving Healthcare Professionals was started in 2017. It is a national programme led by the OHID and Sport England, which aims to support healthcare professionals to increase their knowledge and skills and

incorporate physical activity within routine care to improve patient outcomes. There are links to training resources through e-Learning for Healthcare (e-LfH) for healthcare professionals and many other useful links to research, guidance, support and campaigns such as ‘This Girl Can’ and ‘We are Undefeatable’.

## Moving Medicine

### [Access here](#)

Moving Medicine provides clinicians and allied health professionals with accessible, evidence based, [condition specific information](#) to help give advice on physical activity at all stages of treatment pathways for children, young people and adults. It has a handy Evidence Finder, and Consultation Guides with useful pointers for Active Conversations.

Moving Medicine is an initiative by FSEM (Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine UK) and is aimed at doctors and other healthcare professionals within the health service. It is fun and inspiring and positive.

## Physical Activity Public Health Initiatives Active Partnerships Programme

The Active Partnerships Programme receives long term Investment from Sport England to level up access to sport and physical activity across the country.

There are 43 Active Partnerships across England, established by Sport England as a nationwide network of local partnerships. The vision of the network is to make active lifestyles the social norm for everyone and their role is to work in partnership to create the conditions for this in every locality.

They aim to work across all sports, activities, providers and audiences, focused on the needs of their local communities, especially inactive people and under-represented groups who will benefit the most from an active lifestyle.

Find your area through and explore local initiatives [here](#).

## Local Authorities

Local Authorities are core strategic partners of Active Partnerships. Many have their own 'Active' programmes, so a quick search should give you an idea of provision in your area.

An inspiring example is 'One You Lincolnshire', funded by [Lincolnshire County Council](#) and delivered by [Thrive Tribe](#), which delivers similar schemes in other areas.

### [Access here](#)

## Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland

In the UK, the National Health Service (NHS) is the umbrella term for the four health systems of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, the devolved nations may vary in service structure and delivery, so some aspects of their Public Health and Physical Activity policy reflect this. The focus of this Toolkit is on England. For Physical Activity strategies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, see the following:

### Scotland

- Policy: [Access here](#)
- e-learning – Encouraging and Enabling Physical Activity: [Access here](#)

### Wales

- Policy: [Access here](#)
- Wales National Exercise Referral Scheme: [Access here](#)

### Northern Ireland

- Policy – Active Living Strategy: [Access here](#)

## Communication (MECC)

The CPD theme of Communication in 2021/22 gave the profession a helpful focus on how chiropractors talk to patients to improve outcomes, using MECC and motivational interviewing to bring about behaviour change. RCC Netclix has the series of lectures on this topic to access.

[Access here](#)

The RCC Chiropractic Practice Standard: Communication with Patients, highlights relevant areas of the GCC Code as requirements, provides expected standards of practice informed by evidence, additional helpful guidance, and a benchmark for normal practice.

[Access here](#)

Noting a patient's history, level and nature of physical activity as 'necessary information', identifying their goals for treatment and planning their care to support them in making positive changes, all fall within the Practice Standard.

***“Good communication is the cornerstone of a chiropractor’s interaction with their patients.”***

## Courses: Physical Activity and Health, MECC

### Health Education England e-Learning for Health Hub (e-LfH)

The HEE elfh Hub offers e-learning programmes developed in partnership with the NHS, 3rd sector and professional bodies, some of which can be accessed for free by health and care professionals.

The platform offers two excellent courses which are key training resources for chiropractors wishing to develop their knowledge about Physical Activity and improve their communication skills. You need an account, which is easy to set up.

These are:

- Physical Activity and Health
- MECC (Making every Contact

Count)

Search the catalogue [here](#) to find them.

***“The solutions people find for themselves are the most enduring and effective. Being listened to and being understood is an important part of the process of change.”***

## CPD: Paid resources

### RSPH Courses

The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) is an independent health education charity and the world's oldest public health body. Their vision is that every community, workplace and individual should have the opportunity to optimise their own health and wellbeing.

They run a variety of courses, some online, others hosted by a network of centres. Of relevance to chiropractors seeking to improve their knowledge and skills in the area of health improvement and physical activity, the following modules may be of interest:

RSPH Level 2 Understanding Health Improvement. An online course

[Access here](#)

RSPH Level 2 Award in Encouraging Physical Activity. Offered by a network of RSPH centres.

[Access here](#)

### Moving Medicine's Active Conversations course

[Access here](#)

This may not be available to chiropractors. If not, their website has free resources on Active Conversations.

### Local initiatives through Active Partnerships

[Access here](#)

Through your Local Authority or County:

Enter 'Active' followed by your Local Authority or County name to explore your local programme.

### Social prescribing

Sometimes referred to as community referral, social prescribing is a means of enabling GPs, nurses and other health and care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services. Most models of social prescribing involve a link worker or navigator who works with people to access local sources of support.

Schemes can involve a variety of activities which are typically provided by voluntary and community sector organisations, e.g volunteering, arts activities, group learning, gardening, befriending, cookery, healthy eating advice and a range of sports.

[Access here](#)

# Educational resources for patients

Chiropractors are well placed to support their patients to engage in more activity by signposting to a mixture of locally run community events and services as well as online/app-based technology to help them

As well as informing patients, it's often helpful to have clinic-based infographics or posters to reinforce public health topics with signposting options for the more introvert/reserved patients.

[Access here](#)

**How much physical activity should you do?**

Adults (19 to 64) should aim for at least **150 minutes** of moderate intensity activity, in bouts of 10 minutes or more, each week

This can also be achieved by 75 minutes of vigorous activity across the week or a mixture of moderate and vigorous.

All adults should undertake muscle strengthening activity, such as

- exercising with weights
- yoga
- or carrying heavy shopping

at least 2 days a week

Minimise the amount of time spent sedentary (sitting) for extended periods

Source: Public Health England

## Parkrun

A free community event where you can walk, jog or run with the aim of achieving a 5KM distance. There are also opportunities to volunteer and spectate with each weekly event on Saturday mornings which start at 9.00am. "Parkrun is a positive,

welcoming and inclusive, there is no time limit and no one finishes last". With 780 locations worldwide most can find a Parkrun event on their doorstep.

[Access here](#)

## Walking sports

Often in existing local sports clubs there are now a large emerging network of the walking variant of the sport. The Walking Football Association is a well-established network of national clubs offering football. The threat of pain, discomfort and injury is reduced due to the combination of a slower pace and reduced contact. This allows people who have loved the sport all their lives to once again safely get back to playing. It also introduces the sport to people who perhaps have never considered playing before. Walking football was conceived as a sport for the over 50's but now includes many in their 70's and 80's playing regularly. There is a growing network as well in Netball and Hockey.

Walking sports: [Access here](#)

Walking football: [Access here](#)

## Couch to 5K

The Couch to 5K is a running plan for absolute beginners. It was developed by a new runner, Josh Clark, who wanted to help his mother get off the couch and start running! The plan involves three runs a week, with a rest day in between, and a different schedule for each of the 9 weeks. Couch to 5K is for everyone, whether you've never run before or you just want to get more active. Couch to 5K is a free and easy way of getting fitter and healthier.

[Access here](#)

## Everyone Active

Everyone Active GP exercise referral: A 12-week referral to your nearest centre aims to provide opportunities for people with underlying medical conditions, or those at risk of developing conditions to become

more active in a safe and welcoming environment. Referrals are made through your patient's GP practice or by submitting a form online to the referral team.

Survey: [Access here](#)

GP referral scheme: [Access here](#)

## Active 10

A Step counting app. From the NHS comes a free app for smartphones to anonymously record every minute of walking you do. Keep your phone in your pocket and the app will track your steps, help set goals and send you notifications of achievements when you meet your goals as well as tips to boost your activity.

[Access here](#)

## Sport England

Join the movement (Sport England) – A national lottery funded campaign to help us all get more active. Offering simple, fun and free ways to get active, both indoors and outdoors that can be enjoyed safely.

[Access here](#)

## The Rambling Association

The Rambling Association – likely for more senior populations is the long-established rambling association. Not only do they promote group walking but they also are very active in the conservation of the UK's 49,000 miles of footpaths through volunteering and group work.

[Access here](#)



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