

PERSONALBEST

WELLNESS REINVENTED

MOVEMENT IS MEDICINE



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Movement is Medicine

Put your hands in the air if you've raised your arm above your head today? Chances are, unless you are of school age and keen to get the teacher's attention (or you're a scaffolder or pole dancer), this may be the first time that you've performed this movement today!

You may not be aware, but your human shoulders are the most mobile joint in your body. According to Medscape, "this mobility provides the upper extremity with tremendous range of motion such as adduction, abduction, flexion, extension, internal rotation, external rotation, and 360° circumduction in the sagittal plane. Furthermore, the shoulder allows for scapula protraction, retraction, elevation, and depression".

On leaving school and the rigours of PE lessons behind, most of the population embark on a career path that involves a daily commute to an office desk with very little need to raise their hand above the level of the keyboard.

As we continue through life, our movement vocabulary diminishes, and by coincidence our aches and pains come to the surface. Many of us will not be aware that we have become 'PA deficient', a condition first identified by Dr William Bird MBE. Having spent many years as a GP seeing patients, he was able to pinpoint a variety of common symptoms that were attributed to this new ailment he labelled PA deficiency. PA is an abbreviation of *Physical Activity*.



Do any of these apply to you or anyone you know?

- Increase in poor mood/low self esteem
- Weight gain
- Sallow skin
- Poor sleep
- Muscle wasting
- Constipation
- Increased falls in the elderly
- Accelerated cognitive decline



Alarmingly, those with PA deficiency have:

- 38% more days in hospital
- 5.5% more family physician visits
- 13% more specialist services
- 12% more nurse visits

There are 27 million PA deficiency sufferers in the UK, which costs the NHS over £1 billion a year.

It's not all bleak news, because there is an antidote. According to Dr Bird, those who participate in regular physical activity have a:

- 30% reduced risk of death
- 35% reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease and stroke
- 35% reduced risk in Type 2 diabetes
- 35% reduced risk in hip fracture
- 80% reduced risk in osteoarthritis disability
- 30% reduced risk of colon cancer
- 20% reduced risk in breast cancer
- Reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease

As we entered the new millennium, the Health Education Authority (HEA) reported that exercise was a key factor in managing obesity and greatly reducing the risk of diabetes, coronary heart disease, cancer and osteoporosis. Yet the same report also sadly concluded that only 36 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women were active enough to stay healthy – even though the recommended levels of exercise weren't particularly strenuous.



The guidelines given were:

- At least 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity at least five days a week, to achieve health benefits to minimise mortality
- At least 20 minutes of vigorous intensity activity three or more days a week, to maximise aerobic fitness as well as reduce mortality.

To make matters worse, most sedentary people didn't even know they had a problem. 56% of the men and 52% of the women in the HEA survey truly believed they were getting plenty of exercise.

Findings like this show how little we know about ourselves – or perhaps how little we give our bodies the respect and attention they deserve. Our bodies were designed to move and the more we use them in the way they were intended, the better we are going to look and feel.

In his latest book, entitled 'The Body', Bill Bryson pronounces 'suicide by lifestyle as a slow process', a point backed up by the Department of Health, who describe inactivity as a 'silent killer.' With the knowledge that inactivity leads to decline both mentally and physically, we should all make a conscientious effort to not only raise our activity levels, but also reduce the amount of time we spend sitting down.

With research suggesting that a majority of adults spend more than 7 hours a day sitting down, at work or on transport, the future for our spine and our health is not looking too promising. Compound this with the fact that machines wash our clothes, our entertainment is often based around a TV or screen, and fewer of us perform manual work, our prospects aren't great. And it gets worse with old age, with people aged over 65 spending 10 hours or more each day sitting or lying down, making them the most sedentary age group.



“Exercise ferments the humours, casts them into their proper channels, throws off redundancies, and helps nature in those secret distributions, without which the body cannot subsist in its vigour, nor the soul act with cheerfulness.”

Joseph Addison, The Spectator, July 12, 1711

Step Out Of The Box

Just pause and consider this for one moment; you live in a box, go to work in a box, do most of your work sitting in front of a box, go back home to your box and then sit in front of another box to relax.

Now consider this; your body was designed to move. We are all the direct descendants of hunter gatherers and it is in our genes to move. If our distant ancestors were unable to move, they would not be able to find food and would ultimately become food. In short, without motion, they wouldn't survive.

As intellectual industrialised beings, we no longer have to worry about surviving, yet we have 639 individual muscles (approximately 400 skeletal muscles) and over 200 bones that need movement to thrive.



“Today, unlike our ancestors, we may choose not to move. In modern life, moving appears to be optional. Thus what we do to work and play no longer fully engages our musculoskeletal functions....The less we move, the less we are capable of moving.”

Pete Egoscue

The human 'body' has not changed in hundreds of years, yet how we use our bodies has changed dramatically, particularly over the past fifty years. Although we may strive for comfortable lifestyles, with minimal time spent on manual chores, the hours invested in inactivity will ultimately provide us with an uncomfortable life. Pain, illness discomfort and disability will be the price we pay for a lack of activity. Movement and motion have now become our medicine; they are our daily prescription for healthy living.

"Walking is man's best medicine."

Hippocrates

As we have seen, the health benefits of regular exercise and physical activity are not only well documented, but they are hard to ignore. Yet still we encounter an unwillingness and resistance to jump on board the 'exercise bus.' For many, exercise conjures up images of pain, discomfort, of being hot and sweaty.

You may recall school PE lessons, being the last one picked, or standing in the middle of a pitch in the depths of winter, wearing ill-fitting uncomfortable clothes, with no real interest or understanding of what was going on around you.



Past experiences and perceptions can shape a lifetime of inactivity and a foot-dragging approach to exercise. Everyone wants to feel better, have more energy and feel younger, but not everyone wants to put in the hard work. If only exercise could be made into a pill, which once taken, would give all the benefits from moving more, regardless of age, sex or physical ability.

Let's take stock, gain some perspective and make a plan. There is no getting away from the fact that inactivity is a major health burden. The good news is, it's never too late to start exercising and benefitting from all the health benefits that physical activity brings. Even if you have had, or you feel like you have had a lifetime of inactivity, we know that it can be hard to get started, but one of the easiest things to do is to try and reduce the amount of time spent sitting every day.



Don't worry about which exercise you need to do, or which class to attend, just think about moving more and moving well!

**"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago.
The second-best time is now."**

Chinese proverb