

Follow these top tips to support people to increase their physical activity levels

1. **Give positive encouragement** to support individuals to resume meaningful activities and reconnect with communities.
2. Work through the resources recommended in this guidance e.g. Falls Assistant to **help the individual understand their physical abilities.**
3. **Encourage individuals to set specific, achievable goals** to increase their physical activity levels (or reduce sedentary behaviours) and identify the actions they need to take to do this.
4. **Identify support networks** (including family and friends) who may assist individuals in achieving their goals; and/or signpost them to support services within local communities that promote wellbeing and support people to be more active (e.g. community strength and balance exercises programmes).
5. **Work with representative groups and external services to ensure the information provided is understood** by those who need it most including those living in care homes, those living with most socio-economic deprivation, those from ethnic minority communities.
6. Ensure those who report a fall, changes in their balance, or an increased dependence on others are **referred to specialist clinician-led services as appropriate** (e.g. community rehabilitation, falls prevention services, Post- COVID (long-COVID) services).

Make every contact count and help those you care for to reverse the deconditioning effect of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Identifying and supporting individuals experiencing deconditioning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

SUPPORT OTHERS TO TAKE ACTION TO RECONDITION AND BUILD UP THEIR STRENGTH AND BALANCE

FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PROFESSIONALS

NFPCG

National Falls Prevention Coordination Group
Empowering local communities to prevent falls



Why read this guidance?

COVID-19 restrictions have meant that many people, particularly those aged between 65 and 80, have been moving much less than normal. As a result, they are weaker, more unsteady and have reduced function and resilience for recovery (deconditioning).¹ It is therefore vital that people begin to increase their levels of activity to combat deconditioning. This will benefit their physical and mental health and increase confidence to participate fully in activities that are meaningful for them. This benefit will also translate into less reliance on health and social care services. Health and care staff, therefore, have a vital role in supporting people to improve their health and wellbeing, by encouraging them to be more active; and to do so using graded and safety focused approaches where necessary.

Engaging in a Making Every Contact Count conversation, that includes the following key questions, will identify who could benefit from more specific support and advice about activity levels:

- **What changes have you noticed in your ability to do what you like/love since the pandemic** e.g. looking after grandchildren?
- **What is different about your level of activity now compared to before the pandemic** e.g. what physical activities do you do currently?
- **Do you have any problems with walking or balance** e.g. do you feel unsteady; have you stopped doing certain things because you feel fearful about having a fall?
- **Are you finding your usual daily activities more difficult than you used to** e.g. are you more breathless after climbing stairs; is cleaning your house/getting out to the shops/using public transport more difficult for you?
- **What are the things you love/like doing? Do you still feel confident/able to do these activities? What would you like to do more of** e.g. restart community groups/activities, meet friends and family in public places?

“even light activity brings some health benefits compared to being sedentary or sitting for most of the day. More physical activity on a daily basis provides greater health and social benefits”.



As well as reading this guidance, familiarise yourself with the **the version of this leaflet for members of the public**. You might choose to discuss this leaflet with individuals and signpost them to recommended resources (see ‘Useful Resources’) to assist them in increasing their activity levels safely and effectively and to sustain these levels over time. It is vital to reassure people, who have become more sedentary because of the pandemic restrictions, that improvements can be achieved.

Individuals who have had COVID-19 (and are still experiencing symptoms such as fatigue) may benefit from support to access specific services and resources to manage these symptoms.

“Older adults with frailty should break up prolonged periods of being sedentary with light activity e.g. get up out of chair and do gentle exercises when physically possible” (DH 2019)

Online links to free further advice and support:

Strength and balance exercises to encourage individuals to try at home:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/>

‘Active at Home’ booklet: <https://bit.ly/3G6hy68>

Keeping Well at Home booklet: <https://bit.ly/3lrT27p>

Join Movement Snacks (10-15 minutes of a mix of seated and standing movements) on Facebook live at 8am, noon and 4pm daily

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/groups/MakeMovementYourMission/>

If an individual is at risk of falling, to help health and care staff decide what to do next and how to access support to prevent falls, take a look at <https://fallsassistant.org.uk/>

There are further resources on the Moving Medicine website aimed at supporting healthcare professionals to incorporate physical activity into conversations and goal setting with individuals: <https://movingmedicine.ac.uk/>

1. Public Health England (2021) Wider impacts of COVID-19 on physical activity, deconditioning and falls in older adults. Accessed online 20th October 2021 at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1010501/HEMT_Wider_Impacts_Falls.pdf