

AHS: Seniors Health Strategic Clinical Network

Maintaining and Improving Health through Active Living

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If you had to guess, how many steps have you taken so far today? Step counts are one method of measuring walking behaviours associated with active living. Active living is a phrase used to describe the integration of the physical activity needed to optimize health into daily life (Tremblay, 2007). Physical activity is part of a healthy lifestyle. Just as we adopt health behaviours like brushing and flossing our teeth, or eating a balanced diet full of fresh fruits and vegetables, an active lifestyle should be something we all strive to achieve.

Promotion of physical activity is an important public health issue. The “Active Alberta” policy by the Government of Alberta reflects recognition that active living is essential for healthy individuals and communities. Within the Seniors Health SCN, advocacy of active living and promotion of physical activity align with both the priority areas of Health Aging and Seniors Care and Aging Brain Care. The positive benefits of participating in physical activity and an active lifestyle can improve the health and health outcomes of older adults, including frail individuals and those with cognitive decline. An active lifestyle can help older adults maintain or improve health outcomes such as cognitive and physical functioning (Angevaren, 2008; Heyn, 2004), and health-related quality of life (Austin, 2012).

However, despite the known benefits of physical activity, only 35% of older Albertans (65 years of age and older) are sufficiently active to receive the health benefits associated with physical activity (ACAL, 2013). The Canadian guidelines recommend that older adults get a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate- to vigorous- intensity aerobic physical activity each week (CSEP, 2011). Not to worry, the weekly total can be accumulated in bouts of 10 minutes or more. And this is where active living comes in – by taking small actions throughout the day, every day, we can all take steps to meet the guidelines and optimize our health.

How can you incorporate active living strategies into your day?

Choose the stairs rather than escalator or elevator; take a lap of the mall before you start your shopping; park your vehicle in the stall farthest away from the store entry; download a smartphone app that uses a fun and challenging game to encourage physical activity; buy a pedometer to track your daily step progress and boost your motivation to get in a few more steps each day!

Related Links:

Active Alberta policy: <http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/recreation/active-alberta/pdf/Active-Alberta-Policy.pdf>

Alberta Centre for Active Living: <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/>

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Adults:

http://www.csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/CSEP_PAGuidelines_older-adults_en.pdf

MyHealth Alberta:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/healthy-living/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=tn9719>

Dr. Heather Hanson is the Assistant Scientific Director, Seniors Health Strategic Clinical Network. Dr. Hanson has expertise in older adult mobility and is an advocate for the role of physical activity in the prevention of avoidable functional decline. For more information, please see the Seniors Health SCN website at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/7702.asp>