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# Risk factor: physical inactivity

"Take a stroll after meals and you won't have to go to the medicine shop."  
Ancient Chinese proverb

Industrialization, urbanization and mechanized transport have reduced physical activity, even in developing countries, so that currently more than 60% of the global population are not sufficiently active.

Physical exercise is linked to longevity, independently of genetic factors. Physical activity, even at an older age, can significantly reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity, help reduce stress, anxiety and depression, and improve lipid profile. It also reduces the risks of colon cancer, breast cancer and ischaemic stroke.

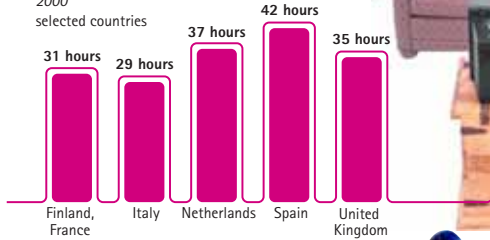
Doing more than 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or 60 minutes of vigorous physical activity a week – whether at work, in the home, or elsewhere – can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease by approximately 30%.

Despite documented evidence of the benefit of physical activity in preventing and treating cardiovascular and other chronic diseases, more than a quarter of a million individuals die each year in the United States because of a "lack of regular physical exercise".

Only 8% of the world's population currently owns a car. Between 1980 and 1998, the global fleet of cars, trucks and buses grew by 80%, with a third of the increase taking place in developing countries.

### Sitting

Time spent seated each week, people aged 18 years and above 2000 selected countries



### Physical activity

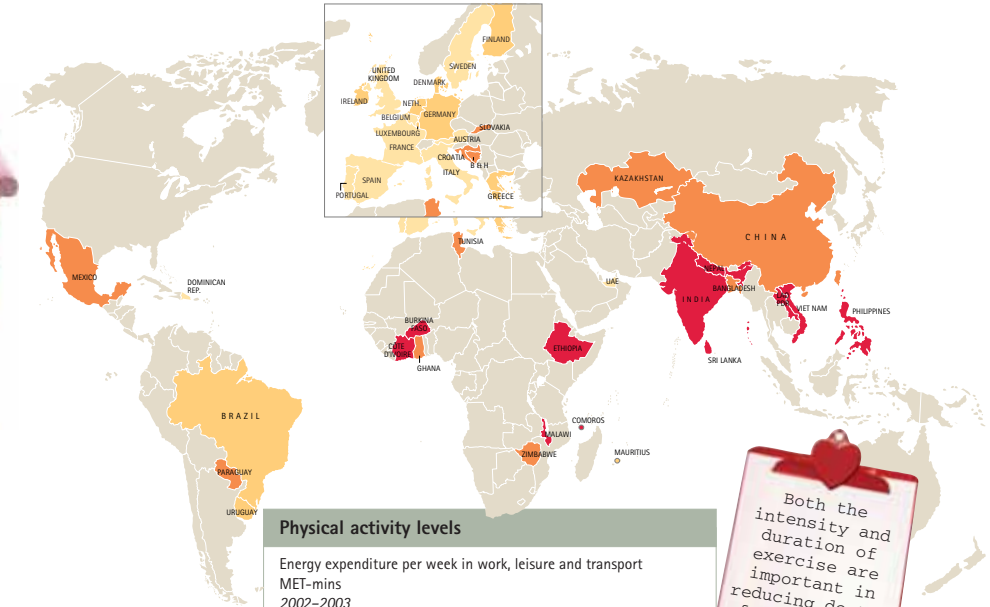
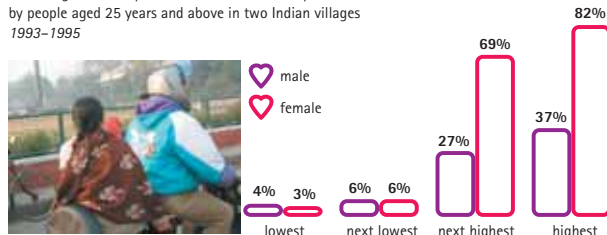
The following activities have similar benefits to health:

- Washing and waxing a car for 45–60 minutes
- Washing windows or floors for 45–60 minutes
- Playing volleyball for 45 minutes
- Wheeling self in wheelchair for 30–40 minutes
- Bicycling 8 km in 30 minutes
- Pushing a pushchair 2.5 km in 30 minutes
- Walking 3 km in 30 minutes
- Swimming laps for 20 minutes
- Playing basketball for 15–20 minutes



### Physical inactivity by social class in India

Percentage of time spent seated, at work or in spare time, by people aged 25 years and above in two Indian villages 1993–1995



### Physical activity levels

Energy expenditure per week in work, leisure and transport MET-mins 2002–2003  
1 MET is the amount of energy expended while sitting quietly at rest

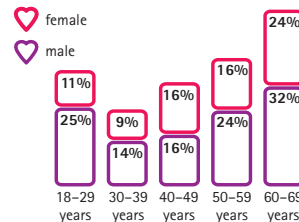
- 6000 and above
- 3500–5999
- 1300–3499
- below 1300
- no data

Both the intensity and duration of exercise are important in reducing deaths from coronary heart disease.

- Being physically inactive increases your risk of coronary heart disease and ischaemic stroke by around 1.5 times.
- Worldwide, physical inactivity causes about 1.9 million deaths, 20% of cardiovascular disease and 22% of coronary heart disease.
- In 1997, in China there were 250 bicycles to every car, while the USA had less than one bicycle to every car.
- 25% of the world's cars are in the USA, a country with just 5% of the world's population.

### Singapore keeps moving

Percentage participation in any form of sport for at least 20 minutes, on 3 or more days a week, by age 1998



#### 750

Number of motor vehicles per 1000 people 1996

#### Transport

Number of motor vehicles per 1000 people 1996 selected countries

#### The global fleet

Number of vehicles 1950–1994, 2025 projected