

The Case for Exercise Even During the Pandemic

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Tomorrow, the first Saturday in June, is National Health and Fitness Day, confirmed by statute, proclaimed by 500 cities, and replete with important implications for all Canadians.

Beyond the current Pandemic, we're concerned about a different epidemic, one that began decades ago, has continued to spread, and is particularly harmful during self-isolation.

We're talking about the epidemic of sedentary behaviour.

Trends of sedentary behaviour, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and mental illness have steadily worsened, and consequent "sickness care" costs have steadily climbed.


According to ParticipAction, Canada ranks poorly against other nations: out of 49 countries, we're 12th in Physical Activity, 24th in Sedentary Behaviour, and 45th in Active Transportation. 90% of our children fail to get enough daily physical activity. Over 72% of our children are staring at screens more than two hours daily. Urbanization has made children less active in the outdoors. Since 1979, the percentage of our children that are overweight or obese has tripled to approximately one in three. Canadians are experiencing increasing levels of anxiety and depression. The Public Health Agency of Canada estimates that obesity costs Canadian taxpayers up to \$7 billion annually.

Significant evidence demonstrates that physical activity enhances self-confidence, peace of mind, relationships, workplace productivity, academic performance and overall wellbeing. It reduces crime and is proven to prevent and treat mental illness, diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease. Being active in nature improves sleep, mental health, blood pressure and stress hormone levels.




If you have COVID-19 symptoms, have in recent days traveled internationally, or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, follow the health authorities' instructions to self-quarantine. Our words here are for Canadians that don't fit in those literally-stay-at-home categories. For people outside those categories, COVID brought confusion about what levels of exercise are safe. Governments need a unified message, that safe physical activity and outdoor recreation are critical to overall health and fitness.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING WHEN EXERCISING OUTDOORS



- Wash your hands before going out and after you return home.**
- Go out when it is less crowded so you can keep a distance of 6 feet from others.**
- Do not use park amenities (e.g. sports fields, tennis courts).**
- Step aside or pass others quickly and courteously on sidewalks.**
- Don't make plans to meet up with friends.**

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Dr. Jack Taunton, one of the founders of Sports Medicine in Canada and our country's top physician in the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games, points to Belgian Professor Bert Blocken's recent groundbreaking study, which tackles these questions directly. Blocken concluded that virus-carrying droplets spread more broadly as the velocity of the person increases. Therefore, consistent with common sense, adequate physical distance is greater for biking and running than walking. Blocken's study indicates greater distance is required while running or cycling.

Taunton says, "The study by Belgian Professor Blocken stands for the proposition that we can exercise safely, even during the Pandemic. In fact, we must exercise to keep up our immune systems, *especially during a pandemic*. We need exercise for physical, mental, and spiritual health."

Heightened physical activity routines will increase our quality of life, community health, and environment through increased participation in recreation, sport, and fitness activities. A more active Canada is a Canada on the journey of transformative cultural change, modelled by our community, political, and corporate leaders and reinforced by government policy. Furthermore, looking beyond the Pandemic, physical activity is one way to restart our country, with positive economic consequences well documented by the Americans.



Tomorrow, National Health and Fitness Day, is an opportunity to re-evaluate our personal activity routines. This June 6th, let's exercise active citizenship. Let's size up how to exercise safely, for our health, and the health of our fellow Canadians. And, for good measure, invite a friend along!

Together, as we say at The National Health and Fitness Foundation and the National Health and Fitness Institute, let's "Make Canada the Fittest Nation on Earth".

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