



Exercising with schizophrenia

Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

How to get started

Exercise has been shown to significantly improve your physical and mental health and wellbeing. Regular exercise has been shown to relieve depression and help you feel less irritated, introverted and tense, and reduce the perception of auditory hallucinations. It can also help increase your self-esteem and reduce your sense of isolation, as it offers opportunities for you to socialize and develop new interests. Overall, exercise improves the quality of your life, prevents relapse, and helps you to maintain a healthy weight and improve sleep patterns.

Regular exercise will also significantly improve your physical health so that you feel healthier and more able to undertake the activities of daily living, including leisure time with friends and family. Additionally, exercise significantly reduces your risks of heart disease, hypertension, some cancers, stroke, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and obesity.

Medicine plays an important part of the treatment process of schizophrenia. If you are on a high dose of antipsychotics, however, regular exercise may not benefit you. If this is the case, speak to your doctor or healthcare provider about how you can increase your activity levels.

Develop an exercise plan in consultation with your doctor or healthcare provider in order to maximise the health benefits from each type of exercise effectively and safely.

Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely. Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

Be active

Some is good, more is better

How much:	Aim for at least 150 – 300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75–150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
How hard:	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.
How long:	Aim to spread out your session throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.

What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: walking, cycling, dancing, swimming, water aerobics, hiking—choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as soccer, tennis, or volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health.
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What will it do for me?

Regular exercise can help manage your symptoms, significantly reduce your risk of long-term diseases and help improve your self-esteem.

Build strength

How much:	At least twice a week.
How hard:	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time.
How long:	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1–2 sets.
What type:	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. Strength exercises you can do at home include squats, calf raises, wall push-ups, arm curls, knee curls, front and side arm raise, and chair stand.

What will it do for me?

Regular strength training helps maintain bone, muscle and joint health.

Improve balance

How much:	At least three days a week.. Start with one session per week, if necessary, and gradually work towards two.
How hard:	Choose 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10–15 times.
How long:	Hold each balance for 10-30 seconds.
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi or home balance exercises such as standing on one foot, a heel-to-toe walk or a balance walk lifting one leg at a time. Ask your doctor or healthcare provider for a specific balance plan.Ensure the area you are exercising in and the type of balance exercise is safe. If you are at high risk of falling, do seated balance exercises or use a sturdy chair or wall for support.

What will it do for me?

Practicing balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries.



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Sedentary living

Reduce the amount of time being sedentary. Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity). It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer. Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none!**

Exercise safety

Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level. Always exercise within your abilities.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Resources

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) provides resources to learn more about schizophrenia and the interdisciplinary nature of treatment. <https://schizophrenia.ca/learn-more-about-schizophrenia/>

Free and confidential mental health and substance use support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from Wellness Together Canada. Call 1-866-585-0445 or text WELLNESS to 686868 for youth or 741741 for adults.

For Indigenous peoples, The Hope for Wellness Help Line provides immediate emotional support, crisis intervention or referrals to community-based services with experienced and culturally sensitive help line counsellors. Call 1-855-242-3310 (toll-free) or connect to the online Hope for Wellness chat. <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, call Talk Suicide Canada at 1-833-456-4566. Support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

