

# Practicing healthy movement behaviours in the COVID-19 era

*Please note that the information published here is based on current recommendations. However, the situation surrounding COVID-19 is constantly evolving and recommendations may be subject to change. For updated information, please check with your local public health authority.*

As “social distancing”, “physical distancing” and “self-isolation” enter the global public lexicon our daily routines are being completely upheaved.

Canadians are being asked to practice social distancing (more recently and appropriately being called physical distancing) to decrease the spread of COVID-19 in the community. Physical distancing involves [‘taking steps to limit the number of people you come into close contact with.’](#) This has led to many Canadians now working from home, cancelling large group meetings, and generally limiting their physical interactions with their colleagues, peers, and family.

These new restrictions are going to affect the physical and mental health of Canadians. A total upheaval of routine means that it may be tempting to indulge in movie marathons, stay up late, and become complacent with screen time restrictions for ourselves and our children during this pandemic. This also means that we may start to feel isolated from our communities. We are at risk of falling into a new normal that can have negative effects on our overall health.

Now more than ever is the time to adhere to [healthy movement guidelines](#) to maintain a healthy immune system and build a strong defence. Adhering to healthy lifestyle behaviours, which includes getting a good night’s sleep, engaging in regular exercise, and moderating your sedentary time all contribute to the ability of a fit human to [withstand a health challenge](#). This is the best insurance policy for us against any challenge to our health. While the population should always be thinking about these healthy lifestyle behaviours, now more than ever we need to keep ourselves as healthy as possible. It is our social responsibility.

Moreover, self-isolation is consistent with [depression and anxiety](#). This is especially problematic in the current climate because [anxiety can increase risk of infection](#). [Getting active is important for managing depression, anxiety, and stress](#), and keeping ourselves, and our community healthy.



## The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines - Physical Activity

So what does adhering to healthy lifestyle behaviours look like? The [Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines](#) published by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) state that for physical activity:

**Infants (<1 year)** should be physically active several times a day in a variety of ways, particularly through interactive floor-based play—more is better. For those not yet mobile, this includes at least 30 minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day while awake.

**Toddlers (1-2 years)** should accumulate at least 180 minutes spent in a variety of physical activities at any intensity, including energetic play, spread throughout the day—more is better.

**Preschoolers (3-4 years)** should accumulate at least 180 minutes spent in a variety of physical activities spread throughout the day, of which at least 60 minutes is energetic play—more is better.

**Children and Youth (5-17 years)** should accumulate at least 60 minutes per day of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity involving a variety of aerobic activities. Vigorous physical activities, and muscle and bone strengthening activities should each be incorporated at least 3 days per week.

**Adults (18+ years)** should accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate-to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more. It is also beneficial to add muscle and bone strengthening activities using major muscle groups, at least 2 days per week. More physical activity provides greater health benefits.

**Older adults (65 years and older)** with poor mobility should additionally perform physical activities to enhance balance and prevent falls.



## The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines - Sleep

The CSEP guidelines on sleep for the early years, children, and youth state:

**Infants (0-3 months)** should accumulate 14-17 hours of good-quality sleep, including naps.

**Infants (4-11 months)** should accumulate 12-16 hours of good-quality sleep, including naps.

**Toddlers (1-2 years)** should accumulate 11-14 hours of good-quality sleep, including naps, with consistent bedtimes and wake-up times.

**Preschoolers (3-4 years)** should accumulate 10-13 hours of good-quality sleep, which may include a nap, with consistent bedtimes and wake-up times.

**Children (5-13 years)** should accumulate 9 to 11 hours of sleep per night.

**Youth (14-17 years)** should accumulate 8 to 10 hours per night, with consistent bed and wake-up times.

**Adults (18+ years)** CSEP is currently in the process of putting together new 24h movement guidelines that will include sleep recommendations for adults. The best available evidence recommends that adults should accumulate [7-9 hours of sleep per night](#).



## The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines – Sedentary Behaviour

The CSEP guidelines on sedentary behaviour for the early years, children, and youth state:

**Infants (<1 year)** should not be restrained for more than 1 hour at a time (e.g., in a stroller or high chair). Screen time is not recommended. When sedentary, engaging in pursuits such as reading and storytelling with a caregiver is encouraged.

**Toddlers (1-2 years)** should not be restrained for more than 1 hour at a time (e.g., in a stroller or high chair) or sit for extended periods. For those younger than 2 years, sedentary screen time is not recommended. For those aged 2 years, sedentary screen time should be no more than 1 hour—less is better. When sedentary, engaging in pursuits such as reading and storytelling with a caregiver is encouraged.

**Preschoolers (3-4 years)** should not be restrained for more than 1 hour at a time (e.g., in a stroller or car seat) or sit for extended periods. Sedentary screen time should be no more than 1 hour—less is better. When sedentary, engaging in pursuits such as reading and storytelling with a caregiver is encouraged.

**Children and Youth (5-17 years)** should accumulate no more than 2 hours per day of recreational screen time and should limit sitting for extended periods.

**Adults (18+ years)** CSEP is currently in the process of putting together new 24h movement guidelines that will include sedentary behaviour recommendations for adults. The best available evidence recommends that adults should accumulate [no more than 7.5-9 hours of sedentary time per day](#), though less is better.

### Meet the Guidelines – While Practicing Physical Distancing

- **Unless you are told to self-isolate**, practicing physical distancing includes going outdoors, and being active outdoors. In fact, the Ottawa Public Health Unit lists '[spending time outside and in settings where people can maintain a 1-2 metre distance from each other](#)' as one of the ways to practice physical distancing while getting fresh air and physical activity. Several cities have closed playgrounds or limited access – obey these decisions. Go to parks that remain accessible, ideally at off-peak times to avoid crowds. Be prepared to return home if it is too crowded to practice physical distancing.
- Use other outdoor spaces, such as driveways, backyards, sidewalks, cul-de-sacs, and forests to be physically active while respecting distances and infection etiquette (e.g., staying 2m apart, coughing into elbows, washing hands when back inside). For guidance on physical distancing while using parks and trails see the statement from the [National Parks and Recreation Association](#).

- Subscribe to one of the many online workout memberships or the [ParticipACTION App](#) with a weekday live Fit Break to keep you motivated. Some are free, and others have a sliding scale of suggested payment to help support local fitness instructors. Create a workout space at home, get into your usual workout gear, and break a sweat!
- Physical isolation does not mean you cannot have social connection. A lot of people are starting to do boot camp together over any number of video chat interfaces including Face-time, Instagram, Zoom, and WhatsApp.
- Consider taking micro breaks. For parents trying to get a full day's worth of work done while at home, taking small physical activity breaks with your partner, roommate or kids may just be the way to do this, while helping their, and your, physical and mental health. Daily physical activity recommendations (for [adults](#) or [children and youth](#)) do not have to be met in a single bout.

During these somber, uncertain times for which we have little control, we do have control over our behaviours. Getting active, moderating screen time, and ensuring a consistent bedtime routine with sufficient sleep duration while adhering carefully to public health guidance can help cope, contain, and combat COVID-19.

## National and International COVID-19 Resources

The Government of Canada webpage is an excellent resource for the [latest updates on COVID-19 in Canada](#) and has created a number of easy-to-understand resources on [how to stay safe during the outbreak](#).

For international updates the [World Health Organization](#) is a key resource.

For resources on physical distancing and when and how to self-isolate, the [Ottawa Public Health Unit](#) has a number of excellent guidelines.

## Acknowledgements

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