



# Staying active during Covid-19

Ilka Lowensteyn, PhD

Associate Professor of Medicine,  
McGill University

A photograph of a person's leg running on a road, positioned on the left side of the slide. The runner is wearing black shorts, a grey sock, and a black and white running shoe. The road is asphalt with a yellow dashed line, and the background shows a cloudy sky and distant hills.

# **Conflict of Disclosure**

**This Speaker has no conflict of interest.**

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's right leg and foot as they run on a paved road. The runner is wearing black shorts and a grey and black running shoe. The road has a yellow dashed line in the center, and the background shows a hazy, overcast sky and distant hills.

# Learning objectives

As a result of attending this session, participants will:

- ✓ Learn why exercise is especially important during the pandemic
- ✓ Learn what are the current Canadian physical activity guidelines
- ✓ Have a toolbox of suggestions and resources to help get their patients moving during these difficult times



# Issues

- Closures of parks, gyms, fitness studios, and other public places result in reduced opportunities for physical activity.
- Social distancing may further affect people's ability to exercise, especially if outdoor physical activity is not an option due to bad weather or other factors.
- For individuals working from home, they may be sitting for more extended periods.
- Changes in daily routines — such as caring for children who are home from school — may make it more challenging to find time to exercise.
- Many people are coping with fear, anxiety, stress, financial concerns, sadness, boredom, and isolation — all of which can have a negative effect on physical health, and mental well-being.

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's right leg and foot as they run on a paved road. The runner is wearing black shorts, white socks, and a grey and black running shoe. The road has a yellow dashed line in the center, and the background shows a hazy, overcast sky and distant hills.

# Why is exercise important during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- ✓ **Exercise boosts the immune system:** Research shows that regular, moderate-intensity exercise has immune-boosting benefits that may help your body fight off infections, including COVID-19.
- ✓ **Exercise may prevent weight gain:** Exercise can help you burn extra calories caused by dietary changes and offset the effects of sedentary activities.
- ✓ **Exercise reduces stress and anxiety:** Exercise is a proven mood-booster and can help reduce stress levels and build emotional resilience.
- ✓ **Exercise improves sleep:** There is evidence that suggests regular exercise helps you fall asleep faster and improves sleep quality — and getting a good night's sleep has also been found to boost your immune system.

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's right leg and foot as they run on a paved road. The runner is wearing black shorts, white socks, and a grey and black running shoe. The road has a yellow dashed line in the center, and the background shows a hazy, overcast sky and distant hills.

# Why is exercise important during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Exercise may be especially beneficial for older adults and people with chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, arthritis, or heart disease.

It can help to improve balance, flexibility, strength, mobility, and cardiovascular health. Plus, it can boost energy and overall well-being.



## The Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines

**Move More:** Add movement throughout your day, including a variety of types and intensities. Aim to accumulate at least 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous aerobic physical activity, muscle strengthening activities at least twice a week, and several hours of light physical activities, including standing. Those 65+ should also include physical activities that challenge balance.

**Reduce Sedentary Time:** Limit sedentary time to 8 hours or less per day including no more than 3 hours of recreational screen time and breaking up long periods of sitting where possible.

\* some activity is always better than none and progressing towards any of the guideline targets will result in important health benefits.



# Suggestions to get moving

There are many ways to be active, even when the gym is closed, and you are practicing social distancing.

**Exercise with family:** Exercise is an excellent opportunity for family fun. Walks, dance parties, living-room yoga sessions, or driveway ball hockey games are just a few examples of how family members can exercise together.







## Suggestions to get moving

**Get outdoors even in winter:** Walking, hiking, snow shoeing, skiing can help get some much-needed fresh air while staying safely away from others. Workouts can be broken up into several 10-minute sessions.





# Suggestions to get moving

**Follow along with FREE online exercise videos:** Choices include yoga, cardio kickboxing, Pilates, strength training, barre, dance, or another type of workout. Additionally, many exercise studios and other community organizations are now providing on-demand virtual fitness content.

**Fitnessblender.com** – Website with over 500 cardio and strength videos (simple or no equipment)

**Body Project** – You Tube channel with exercise videos good for beginners to advanced (46 videos)

**POPSUGAR Fitness** – You Tube channel with more beginner to advanced exercise videos (1200 videos)

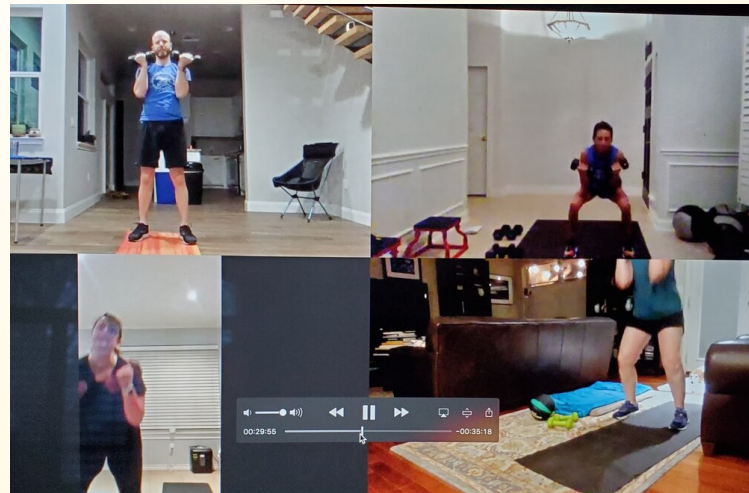
**Walk at Home** – You Tube channel with 180 videos





## Suggestions to get moving

**Take a virtual class:** If financial resources aren't an issue, options include supporting a local fitness studio or personal trainer by signing up for online fitness classes or training sessions. Some personal trainers are even offering private virtual sessions customized to the needs, schedule, and preferences of participants. Class or training sessions are usually scheduled (accountability) and often include multiple participants (interaction), which may increase motivation.





## Suggestions to get moving

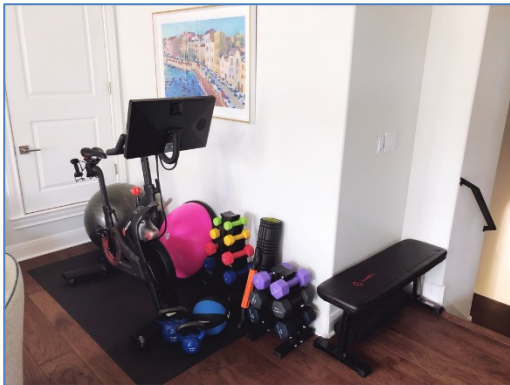
**Tackle calorie-burning chores:** Chores such as mowing the lawn, working in the garden, washing the car, or cleaning out the garage provide excellent opportunities to build muscles, burn calories, and accomplish something at the same time.





## Suggestions to get moving

**Create a mini home gym:** The money saved from unused gym memberships can be put towards an exercise bike, treadmill, or elliptical machine. A few inexpensive pieces of equipment that will allow for more versatile home workouts include a yoga mat, exercise ball, free weights, skipping rope, or a bike pedal stand.





## Suggestions to get moving

**Set a goal:** Set an exercise goal — such as doing 3 x 30-minute exercise videos per week  
OR using a fitness tracker and doing 7,000 steps/day.

Make sure your goal is SMART

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Realistic

Time bound

Example: I will do the Body Project beginner 30-minute cardio video on Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning.



## Case 1

- 75-year old female
- BMI 34 kg/m<sup>2</sup> (gained 5 pounds over the past 6 months)
- Prior to pandemic was attending fitness class for seniors twice a week (45-min/session)
- During pandemic was walking 3-4 times a week for 20-30 minutes
- With the colder weather has not been exercising
- Blood pressure 130/88 mmHg, fasting glucose 5.7 mmol/L, lipids normal
- No contraindications to exercise



## Case 2

- 55-year old male
- BMI 27 kg/m<sup>2</sup> (gained 10 pounds over the past 6 months)
- Prior to pandemic was going to the gym 3 times a week for strength training (30-min/ session) and spinning classes 2 times per week (60-min/ session)
- During pandemic was cycling 2 times a week for 1-2 hours
- With the colder weather has not been exercising
- No medical problems
- No contraindications to exercise





## Case 3

- 40-year old female (mother of 3 children 3, 5, and 7)
- BMI 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup> (gained 12 pounds over the past 6 months)
- Prior to pandemic was constantly moving but no regular exercise
- During pandemic was walking a few times a week for 20-30 minutes (very busy with working from home and home-schooling kids)
- With the colder weather has not been exercising
- Very stressed and has very low energy
- No contraindications to exercise