



Consensus Statement Physical  
activity and health conditions;  
benefits outweigh the risks



# Context for the Consensus Statement on Risk



- Public Health and Clinical guidelines are clear that physical activity has a key role to play in the management of long term conditions
- The International Society for Physical Activity and Health (ISPAH) identify integrating physical activity into healthcare as one of the eight best investments to combat inactivity. But there are systemic challenges to making this a reality.
- People with long term conditions being twice as likely to be inactive then those who do not have health conditions.
- These barriers include almost 50% of GPs, in a recent survey of 830 GPs in England, indicating that a barrier to effectively advising patients about physical activity were concerns by the patient about perceived risks of taking up PA (46%), including aggravating symptoms.
- Current pre participation screening protocols within the sport and physical activity sector & requirements for medical clearance

# Methodology



Preparation

Rapid  
Evidence  
Review

Steering  
Group

Delphi  
Process

# Headline statements



## 1. The benefits outweigh the risks

Physical activity is safe, even for people living with symptoms from multiple medical conditions.



# Headline statements



## 2. The risk of adverse events is very low but that's not how people feel

Well informed conversations with healthcare professionals can reassure people who are fearful of their condition worsening, and further reduce this risk.



# Headline statements



## 3. It's not as easy as just telling someone to move more

Be aware of the concerns of individuals and their carers to help build confidence

# Headline statements



**4. Everyone has their own starting point, begin there and build up gradually**

# Headline statements



## 5. Stop and seek medical review if...

You notice a dramatic increase in breathlessness, new or worsening chest pain and/or increasing GTN requirement, a sudden onset of rapid palpitations or irregular heartbeat, dizziness, a reduction in exercise capacity or sudden change in vision.



# Symptom Statements

- MSK Pain
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Cardiac Chest Pain
- Falls and Frailty
- Dysglycemia
- Palpitations
- Cognitive impairment

The list of conditions covered by this consensus statement is not exhaustive. For instance, Chronic fatigue syndrome/ME and Long COVID were excluded from this study as evidence regarding the risks of physical activity in these conditions is evolving. Existing guidance should be followed for these conditions.

**MSK Pain**

- A temporary increase in pain is normal and does not represent tissue damage.
- It will stop once their body adapts.

**Fatigue**

- A temporary increase in fatigue is normal.
- Physical activity is good for fatigue, sleep and wellbeing.

**Shortness of breath**

- Physical activity will make people feel more breathless.
- Breathlessness can be frightening.
- Advise people to start at a low level and build gradually.

**Cardiac chest pain**

- The long-term benefits far outweigh the temporary, slight increased risk of adverse events in those with ischaemic heart disease.

**Falls & frailty**

- Frail, inactive people have much to gain from building strength and balance.
- Even small improvements reduce the risk of falling and improve confidence.
- Activities should be tailored to the individual's functional and cognitive capacity.

**Dysglycemia**

- There is a risk of short-term hypoglycaemia.
- Hypoglycaemia is the most common adverse event in diabetes treated with insulin or insulin secretagogues, and can occur if not managed appropriately.
- The overall risk of severe hypoglycaemia is not increased.
- High intensity physical activity can make blood glucose levels rise, so people with diabetes will need strategies to deal with this.

**Palpitations**

- Increased awareness of your heartbeat during physical activity can be frightening.
- Physical activity is contraindicated in people with symptomatic and unexplained cardiac tachy- or brady-arrhythmia and appropriate medical management is needed.
- People with controlled atrial fibrillation benefit from regular physical activity.

**Cognitive impairment**

- Strategies to maintain motivation, engagement and safety are important and people with other benefits may support from others.
- Consider functional level, stage of disease, communication ability, preferred environment, risk of falling and other medical conditions.

Logos: The British Society for Rehabilitation Medicine, SPORT ENGLAND, and the University of Birmingham.

## Key messages within our communications



The consensus statements are based on a rapid review evidence and have been developed through an academically rigorous consensus process by Healthcare Professionals, for Healthcare Professionals.

The key message is that the risk of adverse events when getting active is low, and that physical activity is safe, even for people living with symptoms of multiple health conditions. Regular physical activity, in combination with standard medical care, has an important role to play in the treatment and prevention of many conditions. Well informed, person centred conversations with healthcare professionals can reassure people and further reduce this risk.

# Consensus Statements –key documents

[Key links](#)

[Moving Medicine](#)

[BJSM article](#)

[FAQs](#)

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