



This article highlights everyday exercise ideas, helps you understand how to incorporate exercise into your daily activities and create an active zone in the classroom. By **Gillian Burn**

# Exercise for Energy

**H**ave you done 30 minutes of exercise today? The recommendations from the British Heart Foundation and Department of Health aim to encourage us all to take more exercise to help address the increasing trend in obesity and inactivity. Some 2/3rds of men and 1/3rd of women are not exercising sufficiently to benefit their health, and an estimated 43% of men and 34% of women are overweight. Inactivity increases with age and is highest amongst women. There is a strong link between inactivity and obesity. With the current trends, by the year 2010 around 70% of the population will be overweight!

## Exercise recommendation

Aim for 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise on most days of the week. Moderate intensity means that you feel warmer, your heart rate increases and you are slightly out of breath. However, you must still be able to talk! The 30 minutes is achievable for most people and can be accumulated in several 5 or 10-minute slots throughout the day. In addition, we also need to take regular mini breaks, especially if we are sitting for long periods at a computer or desk.

## What are the benefits

Regular exercise helps increase oxygen circulation around the body. It keeps your mind and body alert, improving mental agility and learning capacity, energy levels and stamina.

Regular exercise improves the function of the heart and lungs, reducing the risk of developing coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and osteoarthritis. It can help reduce high blood pressure, benefit the immune system, improve muscle strength and reduce weight.

The focus is on everyday activity – brisk walking, playing with children, cycling, swimming, house work, dancing, gentle jogging and even active shopping! A 20- minute walk burns approximately 100 calories and every time you climb the stairs at school you are benefiting your health.

The Countryside Agency and Walking the Way to Health Initiative (WHI) promotes walking with the aim of achieving 10,000 steps a day. Most of us walk only 4000 - 5000 a day. You may want to treat yourself to a simple step counter to count your daily steps around the school ([www.whi.org.uk](http://www.whi.org.uk)).



## Desk Exercises

In a busy school day, walking between classes will help provide valuable exercise. However, we also need to consider exercise within the classroom or by your desk.

Taking regular breaks during the day helps to keep your mind and body alert. Try the following 3 exercises by your desk (or, better still, with the children in your class) to provide an energy break (adapted from The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy).

- **Deep Breathing!** – take a few deep breaths into your lungs, breathing in to a count of 3 and out to a count of 5. Feel the air going into the bottom of your lungs by the lower part of your rib cage. Breathe out fully to expel all the air from your lungs with each breath.
- **Executive stretch or elbow flare** – place your hands behind your neck loosely grasped. Keep your head and neck tall. Squeeze below the shoulder blades and take your elbows back, taking care not to press on your neck. Hold for five seconds. Repeat three times.
- **Shoulder shrug** – keep your shoulders back and lift them towards your ears, breathing in slowly. Tighten the muscles in your shoulders and hold for five seconds. Breathe out as you drop the shoulders. Repeat three times.

## Combine the above two exercises in the Arm Stretch position:

- **Arm stretch** – reach both arms up to the ceiling clasping your hands together. Bring your hands behind your head, shrug your shoulders up and then down. Bring your elbows back, reach your arms back up to the ceiling for one more stretch, and then bring your arms gently back beside your body. This exercise helps to relieve any tension around your back and shoulders.

**Gillian Burn (Director of Health Circles Ltd) provides training and consultancy services focusing on improving health and quality of life for individuals and companies nationwide. Her programmes focus on creating energy through mind and body health. Gillian has a clinical background and a masters degree in exercise and health. She is a master practitioner in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), Time Line Therapy®, and teaches pilates exercise. She is the author of the Energy & Well-Being Pocketbook published by Management Pocketbooks. She can be contacted on 01628 666 069 and via [www.healthcircles.co.uk](http://www.healthcircles.co.uk)**



- **Chin and neck stretch** – sit tall (as if you have a helium balloon reaching your head towards the ceiling) and look ahead of you. Gently send your chin towards your chest as you look down, tucking your chin in and lengthening the muscles at the back of your neck allowing each vertebra in your neck to move. Slowly return your head to the starting position as you look in front again.
- **Side to side turning** – rotate your head gently to the left and to the right, keeping your eyes on the horizon and aiming your chin towards your shoulders. Allow your eyes to focus on something in the distance as this will also exercise your eyes.
- **Stand up!** – every time you stand up you increase the blood supply to your brain.

## Why muscle strength, body tone and flexibility are important

Maintaining a flexible body allows your muscles and joints to work through their full range of movement. Oxygen flow around the body is enhanced and the nervous system improved by increasing the flow of nerve messages. Simple daily stretches used in exercises like Pilates and yoga can help increase flexibility. For information on classes in your area contact the Body Control Pilates Association or the British Wheel of Yoga. ([www.bodycontrol.co.uk](http://www.bodycontrol.co.uk), [www.bwy.org.uk](http://www.bwy.org.uk))

Muscular strength ensures our muscles stay toned, bones strengthened and functional ability improved. A gradual loss of muscle occurs as we get older, making it even more important to maintain muscle strength.

To increase your fitness further, you will need to increase the frequency and intensity of exercise e.g. brisk walking for 30 - 40 mins, a longer walk at the weekend, cycling, dancing or participating in sport.

## Creating an Active Zone

Create your own active zone every day to keep your body moving by walking at school, moving from your desk regularly, parking further away in the car park and taking the stairs. You will feel more energetic and your body and mind will benefit.

In the next article we will move our attention to managing our work/life balance and finding those precious moments to relax. **TEX**

## Special Offer!

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