



Keeping active with a lung condition

If you have a lung condition, being active can help to improve your quality of life and help you manage your condition.

There are many different ways to be active. You can increase everyday activities like walking or gardening, join an exercise class, take part in a pulmonary rehabilitation course, or take up sports and activities like yoga, dancing and tai chi.

This information explains the benefits of being active and gives practical advice on how to get started. It also gives an overview of what to expect on a pulmonary rehabilitation course.

Concerned about what level of activity is safe for you? Speak to your GP or hospital health professional for advice before you start.

Why is being active important for me?

We're often told that being active is good for us. But if you have a lung condition, you might wonder if it's right for you. In fact, being active can actually help to improve both your breathing and your mental wellbeing.

You might be nervous about becoming active, especially if you haven't been active for a while. But even a little physical activity is better than none at all. And you may feel more in control because you're doing something positive for yourself.

What if I get breathless?

The fear of getting out of breath may put you off doing any activity that makes you more breathless. But in fact, making yourself breathless through exercise isn't harmful.

When it comes to improving your breathing, many people find that being active is more effective than inhaled drugs.

You need strong muscles and a strong heart to use oxygen efficiently. If you increase your fitness and strengthen your muscles, you'll get less breathless doing everyday activities like going shopping, doing housework or climbing the stairs. You may even re-discover activities you thought you could no longer do.

How can I benefit from being active?

Being active has both physical and mental benefits. It improves your fitness, makes you stronger and helps you manage health conditions and stay out of hospital. Physical activity helps you take back control, be more independent and can help you live well for longer.

Physical benefits

Being active has lots of physical benefits:

- improves the strength of your breathing muscles, heart and circulation. This helps you use oxygen more efficiently, so you don't get so breathless
- better muscle strength in every part of your body
- improves bone strength
- helps you resist infections
- helps you maintain a healthy weight
- improves flexibility and joint mobility
- higher energy levels
- better sleep
- lower stress levels and blood pressure
- lower risk of falling (by improving your balance)
- reduces your risk of developing other health problems such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, osteoarthritis, dementia and some cancers

Mental and psychological benefits

We often think that exercise just benefits your body, but it also has many benefits for your mind:

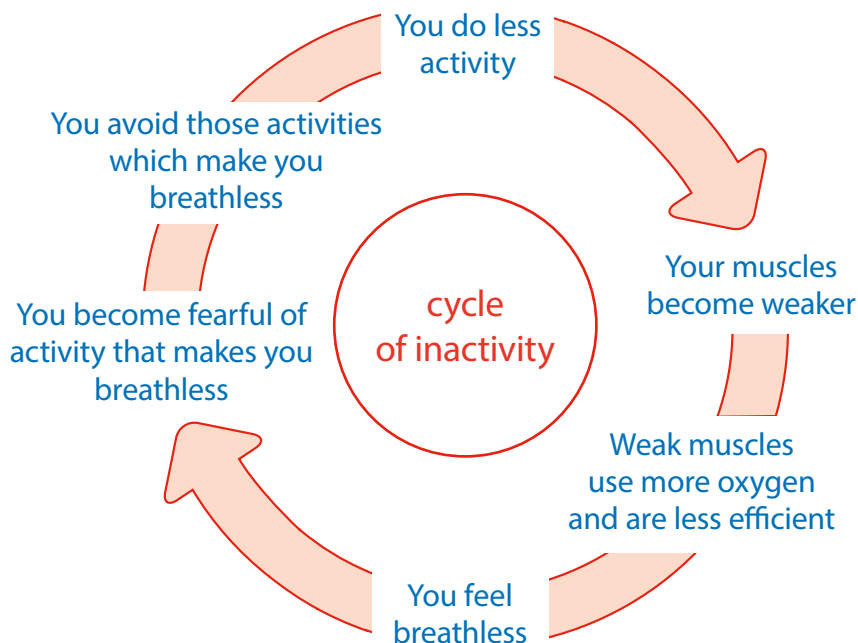
- raises your confidence and self-esteem
- helps your brain work better, so you can learn and remember more
- helps you cope better with the feeling of being out of breath
- reduces anxiety and depression
- creates new social opportunities, so you can get out of the house and meet people
- makes you feel happier.

How will being active affect my breathing?

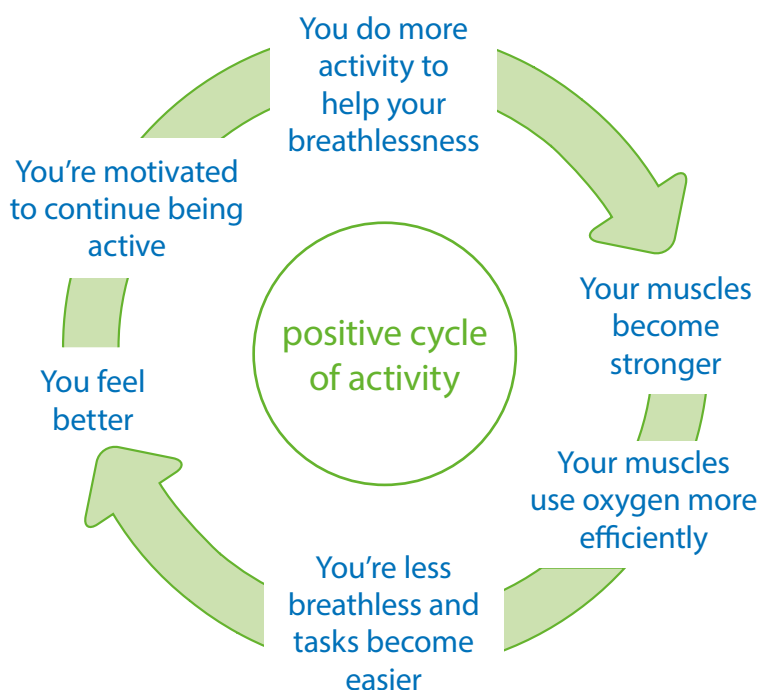
Many people find it surprising, but **getting breathless when you're active is good for you!**

What happens if I'm not active?

If you avoid activities that make you breathless, your muscles become weaker. Weaker muscles need more oxygen to work. Over time you feel more and more breathless. This is called the **cycle of inactivity**, or the **cycle of breathlessness**.



The good news is that you can break this vicious cycle of inactivity. By becoming more active you can make your muscles stronger, including your breathing muscles. This will help you feel less out of breath when you do everyday tasks.



How can I cope with getting breathless?

It's normal to get breathless when you're active, but if you have a lung condition, you may feel anxious about it. If you panic, it can make you feel even more breathless. The key is to stay calm and learn ways to manage your breathlessness.

Useful breathing techniques

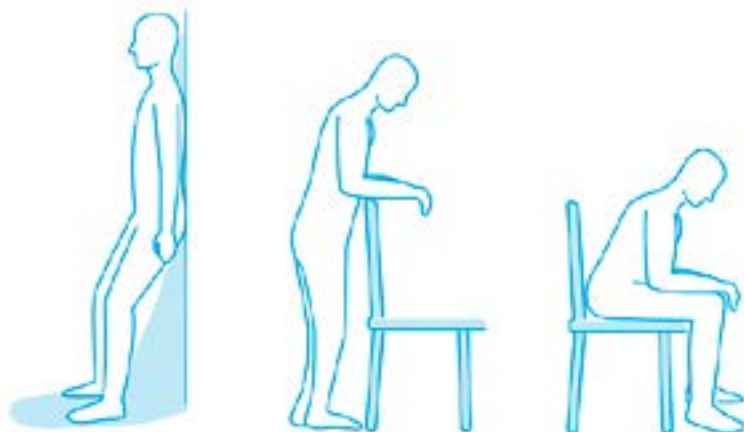
- **Blow as you go:** Use this when doing an action that takes a lot of effort, like standing up or lifting. Breathe in before the action, then breathe out while you're making the big effort.
- **Pursed-lips breathing:** Breathe out with your lips pursed as if you were whistling. This helps you to empty the air from your lungs.
- **Paced breathing:** Pace your breathing so it's in time with your steps. For example, take two steps for every breath in and three steps for every breath out. Find the pace that works for you.
- **Relaxed slow deep breathing:** This is a useful technique at the start of an activity, and sometimes at the end. Slow down your breathing, taking deep breaths. Breathe through your nose if you can.

Try this breathing exercise to help manage anxiety

- Breathe in gently through your nose for the count of 4. Let your tummy rise as you breathe in).
- Hold it for 2
- Breathe out (through your mouth with a whoosh) for 5 or longer if you can.

There's more information on these breathing techniques and how to do them, in our exercise handbook ([blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/what-activities-can-i-do#handbook](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/what-activities-can-i-do#handbook)). You can also see them demonstrated in our exercise video ([blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/exercise-video/breathing-techniques](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/exercise-video/breathing-techniques)).

If you start to feel too out of breath, a recovery position might help. Stand 30cm away from a wall with your feet slightly apart. Lean back or sideways against the wall and let your hands hang by your sides, or rest your thumbs in your waistband. You might also want to try the other recovery positions shown here.



Depending on your lung condition, there are different breathing techniques and positions you could use. Speak to a physiotherapist to find out what's best for you.

Can steam help my breathing?

Some people find that breathing in steam can help clear the airways. You could do this in the shower, or using a 'steam cup inhaler'. But take care. Unclean steam cups or steam rooms can be harmful, especially for people with bronchiectasis. That's because they may harbour bacteria such as Non-tuberculous mycobacterial infection (NTM).

You can read more about breathing techniques and helpful positions for **COPD** ([blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathlessness/how-to-manage-breathlessness/positions-for-obstructive-lung](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathlessness/how-to-manage-breathlessness/positions-for-obstructive-lung)) and **pulmonary fibrosis** ([blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathlessness/how-to-manage-breathlessness/positions-for-restrictive-lung](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathlessness/how-to-manage-breathlessness/positions-for-restrictive-lung)). The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care also has **patient information leaflets** (www.acprc.org.uk/publications/patient-information-leaflets).

How active should I aim to be?

Any activity is better than none. If possible, we should aim to be active every day. Any activity is better than none. Even one minute of activity can benefit your health.

The UK government recommends how active we should be. If you're not very active at the moment, the recommendations below might seem overwhelming. But by starting small and working up, you can still have a positive impact on your health. Over time, your fitness will increase and you'll be able to do more.

Sit less

This is one of the biggest changes you can make. Try to break up long periods of sitting and increase the number of steps you take every day. Research suggests that just 1,000 more steps a day can make a difference. Why not track your daily steps using a smartphone or pedometer? You could set yourself an achievable target to aim for, for example 5,000 steps a day. When you hit your target, you can increase the number and set yourself a new challenge.

Aerobic activity

Every week, try to do at least 150 minutes of activities like **brisk walking, dancing, gardening** and **housework**. That works out at about 20 minutes a day. These aerobic activities work your heart and lungs. Your body warms up, your heart beats faster and your breathing is quicker and deeper than normal. Aim to get moderately out of breath – use the talk test to check you're working at the right level.

Strengthening activity

To get less breathless, strong muscles matter. With strong muscles in your legs and arms, you can do more with the oxygen you breathe in. If your body is weak, it needs more oxygen to do the same tasks.

Aim to do activities that improve your muscle strength at least twice a week. You can fit this into your daily life, for example by **carrying shopping bags**. You could also do **yoga** or use **weights**.

Activities that strengthen the muscles in the front of your thigh (your quadriceps) are really useful. They will help you do things like get up from a chair and avoid falls. **Climbing stairs** and using an **exercise bike** are two activities that can help strengthen your quads.

Improving coordination and balance

If you're older or at risk of falling, include some activities that improve coordination and balance at least one day a week. For example **dance, tai chi, yoga** and **bowls**.

Working at the right level for me

When you're active, you want to get moderately out of breath, but not too much. Check you're exerting yourself the right amount using the **talk test**. Say out loud:

"This activity is going to do me good!"

- If you can say the sentence with two or three stops for breath, you're working at a moderate intensity. This is your aim.
- If you can say the whole sentence without stopping, you can increase the intensity.
- If you can't speak, or can't say more than one word at a time, you may want to slow down.

How can I keep safe when I'm active?

It's important to look after yourself while you're being active.

- Start slowly and gradually build up
- Warm up before and cool down after your exercise
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing and supportive non-slip shoes
- Drink plenty of water
- Wait for at least an hour after eating before starting to exercise
- Have your reliever inhaler with you when you exercise
- Take your inhaler 5-20 minutes before starting, if exercise makes your chest tight or wheezy
- If you normally use oxygen, even for just some of the time or overnight, you can use it at your regular setting when exercising.
- Be active at a level that's right for you – use the talk test to check

For patients with diagnosed heart problems: If you have a glyceryl trinitrate (GTN) spray, have it with you when you exercise.

STOP if you get any sudden symptoms, including: chest pain or tightness, feeling dizzy, nauseous, clammy or cold, feeling increasingly wheezy, or getting sore joints or muscle weakness. Get advice from your GP or health care professional if you get any of these symptoms. In an emergency, call 999.

What activities could I do?

There's no single activity that's best for everyone. Being more active could mean taking part in sports or exercise classes if that's what you enjoy. But you can also be more active just by changing your daily habits. The main thing is to choose activities you enjoy at the right level for you.

Activities in daily life

There are many ways to be more active in day to day life. For example walking up stairs, doing housework, gardening, walking your dog, or playing with your children or grandchildren.

Break up periods of sitting by walking around when you're on the phone or during TV advertising breaks. Try getting off the bus one stop early, or walking to the shops if you usually go by car. If walking there and back seems too much, walk there and get the bus back.

Your occupational therapist (OT) or physiotherapist might also be able to give you some ideas. They might start with basic self-care tasks such as getting dressed. They can give you a plan based on your own abilities and needs. Practising the tasks or exercises suggested by your OT or physiotherapist can help you stay independent, and keep you fit.

Structured activities

There are lots of structured activities which can help you increase your activity levels:

- being active at home
- community activity
- specialist exercise classes
- pulmonary rehabilitation (PR)

Being active at home

Being active at home allows you to work at your own pace. If you're worried about exercising safely at home, why not invite a friend or neighbour to join in?

- **BLF resources:** Our exercise DVD and handbook support you to do simple exercise at home. You can download our exercise handbook from our website. Or you can order a copy online or by calling our helpline on 03000 030 555.
- **Activity DVDs, smartphone apps and online videos:** These are a great way to try out different activities such as yoga, tai chi, keep fit and dancing. Try different activities online or try a DVD or app to see if you like something. Then choose something you enjoy.
- **Active 10 and Couch to 5K:** If you'd like to get out of the house, the NHS Active 10 app (www.nhs.uk/oneyou/for-your-body/move-more/active-10) is a great way to help you fit exercise into your day. Or try the Couch to 5k (www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/couch-to-5k-week-by-week) podcast from the NHS. It helps you gradually increase your activity using a walking or jogging programme.

Community activity

You might be surprised at the number of activities where you live that are suitable for someone with a lung condition:

- **Walking:** Health walk programmes across the UK offer free, short, local group walks. Your health care professional may know about suitable walking groups in your area.
- **Local facilities:** Local authorities, gyms, community halls and schools offer chances to use their facilities or try out activities like swimming, yoga, tai chi, dance, bowls and golf. If you go to the gym, don't be scared to ask an instructor for help and advice.
- **Walking sports:** Walking sports are less strenuous than traditional versions. Aimed at people over 55 or those with a long-term condition, they're a social and flexible way to take part in sport. You could try walking football, netball, cricket, hockey and more.
- **Singing:** Singing can help breathing and wellbeing. It exercises breathing muscles and builds stamina through vocal exercises and songs. Find your nearest group at blf.org.uk/singing

Specialist exercise classes

If you feel you need more support, physical activity specialists can help. There are lots of specialists who are trained to support people with long-term conditions and work on exercise referral schemes.

Chair-based exercises

Chair-based exercise classes involve gentle activity that can help improve your muscle strength, balance and flexibility. They are for anyone who wants to get more active. Most pulmonary rehabilitation classes involve chair-based exercises.

Exercise referral schemes

These schemes allow GPs and other health care professionals to refer patients to specialist activity instructors. You'll get close supervision from a specialist instructor either one-to-one or in a group. Activities might include exercises in a gym, aerobic exercise sessions or water-based fitness classes. Ask your health care professional about exercise referral schemes in your area.

Pulmonary rehabilitation or PR

Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) is made up of:

- a physical exercise programme, designed for people with lung conditions and tailored for you
- information on looking after your body and your lungs, and advice on managing your condition and your symptoms, including feeling short of breath

It's designed for people diagnosed with a lung condition who are breathless. Your PR team will be made up of trained health care professionals such as physiotherapists, nurses and occupational therapists.

A course of PR usually lasts 6 to 8 weeks, with 2 sessions of about 2 hours each week. You'll be in a group of about 8-16 people. PR courses are held in local hospitals, community halls, leisure centres and health centres.

Completing a course of PR is a good way to learn how to exercise safely and at the right level for you. Most people enjoy the course. It builds confidence and it's great fun meeting others in a similar situation.

How will PR help me?

- improve your muscle strength so you can use the oxygen you breathe more efficiently and become less breathless
- help you cope better with feeling out of breath
- improve your fitness so you feel more confident to do everyday tasks
- help you feel better mentally
- help you understand and manage your condition better.

PR helps you manage your condition and makes you feel better, but it's not a cure. You're unlikely to see a change in your lung function, so you may not see a difference in breathing test results. What it can do is help you make the most of the lung function that you have. There's evidence that it improves your ability to walk further, helps you feel less tired and breathless doing day-to-day activities and reduces your risk of ending up in hospital.

PR can also help you enjoy life. Most people enjoy the course. It builds confidence and it's great fun meeting others in a similar situation.

Who should go to PR?

PR is aimed at people with a lung condition whose ability to be active is affected by breathing difficulties. It can benefit people with long-term lung conditions, including bronchiectasis, pulmonary fibrosis, asthma

or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). It's recommended for people coming out of hospital after a COPD flare-up. If you struggle with walking, have uncontrolled heart problems or have recently had a heart attack, PR might not be suitable for you at the moment. Ask your GP or cardiologist about cardiac rehabilitation.

You can do PR if you use oxygen

People who use oxygen to help manage their condition will be assessed to see if a portable oxygen cylinder is needed during the class. If you've been prescribed oxygen and told that your oxygen levels drop when you exercise, portable oxygen treatment may increase how much exercise you can do.

How do I get PR?

Everyone should be referred for PR if they need it. Your GP, practice nurse or respiratory team should refer you. Ask them if PR is right for you and what's available in your area. You may be able to bring a family member or carer with you. Some programmes will have waiting lists, so the sooner you act, the sooner you can start. If you're told you're not eligible for PR, you could try other ways of being active.

What happens on a PR course?

A typical PR course will always start with an assessment of your health and abilities. Your PR team will ask questions to understand you and your body, so they can help you get the best out of the course.

Physical exercise

At each session, you'll spend about half the time on physical exercise. This will be designed to provide the right level of activity for you. You'll get out of breath, but this is part of the therapy. You'll always be monitored and won't be asked to do more than you can safely do.

Information and discussion

For the rest of the time, you'll learn about topics such as:

- why exercise is so important for people with lung conditions
- ways to be more positive about exercise
- how to use breathing techniques during physical activity or when you feel anxious
- how to manage anxiety and low mood
- how to use your inhalers and other medicines
- how to eat healthily
- how to stop smoking
- what to do when you're unwell

For PR to really work you need to be committed, attend sessions regularly and follow the advice given by your team.

After you've completed your course, staying active will help you keep up the progress you've made. You can carry on using the techniques you've learned. Your PR team might refer you to a follow-up exercise programme – ask them if this is an option. Or try one of the other ways we've suggested to keep active.

If there's no follow-up programme, or you don't want to visit the gym, you can carry on with pulmonary rehabilitation at home ([blf.org.uk/technology-for-lung-health/technology-guide/pulmonary-rehabilitation](https://www.blf.org.uk/technology-for-lung-health/technology-guide/pulmonary-rehabilitation)). Ask your therapist for a copy of our exercise handbook, or download a copy from our website.

Tips to get you motivated

Keeping active is much easier if you are motivated to do it. This section helps you think about your motivations for being more active and helps you plan how to begin. You might find it helpful to write down your answers so that you have a plan you can look back at. Why not share your plan with your family or friends so that they can support you?

Why do I want to get more active?

Think about the reasons you want to become more active. For example, *'I want to get back to doing things I used to enjoy'* or *'I want to improve how I feel'*.

What are your top three? You could ask a friend, family member or carer to help you.

1.
2.
3.

How might life be different if I become more active?

How might you feel? What activities might you be able to do that you can't do now? Compare this to what life will be like if you don't become more active.

What good things could happen if I become more active?

.....
.....

What would life be like if I don't become more active?

.....
.....

How can I become more active?

Think about what activities you enjoy or want to try:

I'd like to try...

.....
.....

Think about ways to reduce the amount of time you spend sitting:

I will try to sit less by...

.....
.....

Set your goals

Having a goal gives you something positive to work towards and helps you recognise your progress. Set yourself achievable goals:

- think about what you enjoy doing
- start at a level that's right for you
- build up gradually, at your own pace

My long-term goal

What would you like to achieve in the next few weeks or months? How would you like to feel?

Example: *"At the moment I get the bus to the shops twice a week. By the end of next month, I will walk to the shops instead."*

Try writing your own goal:

.....

My short-term goals

Short-term goals help you gradually build up your activity levels to help you achieve your goal.

Example: *"Next time I go to the shops, I will get off the bus one stop earlier."*

Try to make these goals as specific as possible and include:

- what you'll do
- when you'll do it,
- how long you'll do it for
- who you'll do it with

Tip

Work towards your goal with another person – it can be easier to stay motivated when you have company.

My first short-term goal

I will... ..

.....

When will I do this?

.....

Where will I do this?

.....

Who will I do this with?

.....

Prepare yourself for things that might get in the way of success

What things might stop you achieving your short-term goal? It could be the weather, feeling unwell or other commitments. Think about how you can overcome them:

Things that could get in the way	To overcome this, I will...
Poor weather	... do my exercise DVD at home instead

If you don't achieve your goal, that's OK. Don't be disappointed with yourself – think about what you did achieve, no matter how small.

Take some time to think about why you didn't achieve your goal:

- Was it too difficult?
- Did you give yourself enough time?
- Did you get enough support?

Be kind to yourself and return to an easier stage of your activity plan or think about making changes to your goal to make it more achievable next time.

You might find it useful to keep an activity diary to help you set and review your goals. You can download our 12 week activity diary at blf.org.uk/keep-active/get-started

Make a commitment

Make a pledge to yourself, saying why you want to be more active.

I, (your name), commit to becoming more active so that I can:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Tip

You could place your commitment somewhere visible, like on your fridge, so you're reminded of it every day. Share this commitment with your family or friends, so they can support you.

Help and support

For more information, call our friendly helpline team on **03000 030 555**. They can answer your questions and help you find PR services or exercise classes in your area.

You might want to connect with other people living with a lung condition to share your experiences. You could join our web community at **blf.org.uk/web-community** or get involved with your local Breathe Easy support group. Visit our website or call the helpline to find your nearest group.

Walking groups

Walking groups are an enjoyable, social way to become active. There are free group health walks across the UK which are aimed at supporting people to become active.

England

Walking for Health

www.walkingforhealth.org.uk
020 7339 8541

Scotland

Paths for All

www.pathsforall.org.uk
01259 218888

Northern Ireland

Walk NI

www.walkni.com
028 9030 3930

Wales

Let's Walk Cymru

www.letswalkcymru.org.uk
02920 644308

Walk Unlimited has information on how to get active through walking, plus links to lots of different local opportunities. www.walk.co.uk

Mobility and disability organisations

There are organisations that can help if you have mobility problems or a disability.

England

Activity Alliance

www.activityalliance.org.uk
01509 227750

Scotland

Scottish Disability Sport

www.scottishdisabilitysport.com
0131 317 1130

Northern Ireland

Disability Sports Northern Ireland

www.dsni.co.uk
028 9046 9925

Wales

Disability Sports Wales

www.disabilitysportwales.com
0300 300 3115

Walking sport

Walking sports are a fun and sociable way to become more active at the right level for you. Over the page are some links that you may find helpful, but walking sports are often organised locally, so keep an eye out in your local area for details of walking sport sessions.

Walking football

Find your nearest walking football club at **Walking Football United** – www.walkingfootballunited.co.uk. If you live in Scotland, you can find out more about local groups on the **Paths for All** website – www.pathsforall.org.uk/walking-sport

Walking netball

If you live in England, you can find your nearest walking netball session on the **England Netball** website – www.EnglandNetball.co.uk/my-game/walking-netball

There may be sessions in other areas of the UK. Get in touch with your regional governing body for more information:

Netball NI – www.netballni.org

Netball Scotland – www.netballscotland.com

Welsh Netball – www.welshnetball.com

Walking cricket

Get in touch with your local cricket board or union to find out if they arrange walking cricket sessions in your area. Find your local cricket board or union on the following websites:

England and Wales Cricket Board – www.ecb.co.uk/county-cricket-boards

Cricket Ireland – www.cricketireland.ie/about/provincial-unions

Cricket Scotland – www.cricketscotland.com/about-contact

Walking hockey

Walking hockey is a fairly new walking sport. To find out if there are any sessions in your area, get in touch with your national hockey association:

England Hockey – www.EnglandHockey.co.uk

Ulster Hockey – www.ulsterhockey.com

Scottish Hockey – www.scottish-hockey.org.uk/participation/play

Hockey Wales – hockeywales.org.uk/play

Bowls

Find out about bowls in your area on the following websites:

Bowls England – www.bowlsengland.com

Northern Ireland Bowling Association – www.nibabowls.co.uk

Bowls Scotland – www.bowlsscotland.com

Bowls in Wales – bowlswales.com

Local events

You might like to try out these events in your local area.

Park run is an opportunity to exercise with others – and you don't have to run, you can walk if you want to! www.parkrun.org.uk

Green Gyms are free outdoor sessions where you can get involved with conservation projects such as planting trees and sowing meadows. www.tcv.org.uk/greengym

Exercise referral schemes

Exercise referral schemes are designed to help people who need to become more active for health reasons. If you live in Wales, you can find out more about the **Welsh National Exercise Referral Scheme** at wlga.wales/national-exercise-referral-scheme-ners. If you live in England, Northern Ireland or Scotland, ask your GP whether there are exercise referral schemes available in your area.

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: 03000 030 555

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringing our helpline will cost the same as a local call.

helpline@blf.org.uk

blf.org.uk

Code: BK27 **Version:** 3

blf.org.uk/keep-active

Last medically reviewed: August 2020

Due for medical review: August 2023

We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit **blf.org.uk**