

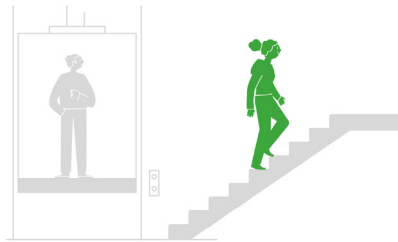
Staying physically active is easy: Climbing stairs

Every physical activity counts!

Incorporating physical activity into your daily life by walking, cycling, climbing stairs, or doing housework or gardening – is good for your physical and mental health. The rule of thumb is: any activity is better than none and increases health and well-being at every age.

Climbing stairs...

- enhances well-being
- promotes good health
- saves electricity
- protects the environment



Every step counts

Whether at home, at work, in public spaces and buildings such as train stations, shopping centres, hospitals, administrative offices, universities, etc., stairs are everywhere and provide an ideal opportunity for people of all ages to improve their health and fitness by incorporating physical activity into their daily lives easily and efficiently.

Did you know? Climbing stairs daily reduces the risk of **cardiovascular diseases**. **Climbing stairs is an everyday activity that trains the cardiovascular system and strengthens the muscles of the buttocks, calves and thighs, thus increasing physical fitness** through brief but intense exertion. Studies have shown that the health-promoting effect kicks in quickly due to the high intensity of stair climbing. The intensity can also be adjusted by changing pace.

By choosing the stairs instead of the lift or escalator on a regular basis, you burn more calories! The energy expended when climbing stairs is: *(Compendium of the American College of Sports Medicine, more than 9 metabolic units (MET) for stair climbing)*

- ⇒ **8x higher than standing in a lift or on an escalator**
- ⇒ **3x higher than walking on even ground**

Walking down stairs is a bone-strengthening exercise due to the weight and load impact placed on the musculoskeletal system. It does, however, use about three times less energy than that needed to climb stairs..

Ideal for those with sedentary lifestyles

Do you spend the majority of your day sitting? Don't have the time or inclination to exercise? If that's the case, taking the stairs is an easy way to get more exercise and keep you awake and alert! **Every step you take to reduce inactivity, such as prolonged sitting, is worthwhile and will have a positive effect on your health, well-being, quality of life and fitness, whatever your age.**



Climbing stairs has many advantages

It is a simple, convenient, time-saving and free way to get fit and stay healthy. Why do we still choose the lift or escalator most of the time? Possible reasons:

- For many people, using the lift or escalator is a habit that they do not question.
- People are unaware of the health benefits of climbing stairs.
- It is more convenient to take the lift or escalator, for instance when you are carrying a heavy bag or are tired.
- Taking the lift or escalator is more attractive because it is faster and safer from the users' point of view.
- The lift or escalator is more visible and easier to access, whereas stairs are often difficult to find and poorly lit, which does not encourage people to use them.
- Escalators are often in direct competition with stairs, e.g. in railway stations.

Do you recognise your own behaviour in one or other of these situation? Try to make a conscious decision to use the stairs on a regular basis. Every step counts!

Have you climbed any stairs today?

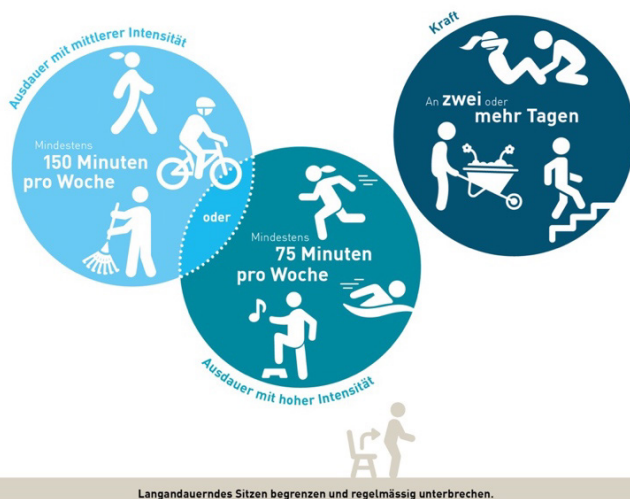
- I have already climbed some stairs today – up and/or down.
- I made a conscious decision today to take the stairs instead of the lift or escalator.
- I climbed several floors on foot today and got out of breath.
- I persuaded other people to take the stairs with me instead of the lift or escalator.

It's never too late to take the first step and any form of exercise is better than none!

Why? Regular physical activity reduces the risk of many non-communicable diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, diseases which cause almost three-quarters of all deaths in Switzerland. People who exercise a lot not only build muscle, but also strengthen their bones, joints, organs and immune systems. In addition, they see improvements in their memory, learning ability and quality of sleep. Exercise also has a positive effect on mental well-being, social contacts and independence in later life.

Physical activity recommendations for adults (18-64)

Täglich empfohlene Bewegung für Erwachsene (18–64 Jahre)



The biggest health benefit comes from a minimum of 150 to 300 minutes of endurance-oriented, medium-intensity exercise (e.g. walking or cycling, gardening or housework) or a minimum of 75 to 150 minutes of high-intensity exercise (e.g. jogging, swimming, cross-country skiing, zumba) per week. Besides endurance, you should also do muscle-strengthening exercises of medium or high intensity at least twice per week.

Chart 1: Physical activity recommendations Switzerland, (Source: hepa.ch 2023)

Sources

Federal Office of Sport FOSPO, Federal Office of Public Health FOPH, Health Promotion Switzerland, Swiss Council for Accident Prevention BFU, Swiss Health and Physical Activity Network hepa. Bewegungsempfehlungen Schweiz. Grundlagen. [Physical activity recommendations for Switzerland.Principles]. Magglingen: FOSPO 2022. <https://backend.hepa.admin.ch/fileservice/sdweb-docs-prod-hepach-files/files/2023/12/19/4cc9a5b5-5aac-4561-99d8-779a5476396d.pdf>

Faktenblatt Treppensteigen [Stair Climbing Fact Sheet], State Centre for Health, North Rhine-Westphalia, 2019. https://www.lzq.nrw.de/php/login/dl.php?u=/media/pdf/ges_foerd/bewegungsfoerderung/faktenblaetter/treppensteigen_faktenblatt_lzq-nrw.pdf

Seiferlein W., Kohlert C. (eds.), Die vernetzten gesundheitsrelevanten Faktoren für Bürogebäude [The interconnected health determinants of office buildings], 2018. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-20852-3_7

Meyer P, Kayser B, Mach F: Stair use for cardiovascular disease prevention. European Journal of Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation 2009, 16 (Suppl 2): S17–S18.

Public Health Agency, Take the Stairs – A guide to implementing a workplace based stair use programme. Belfast, 2017.

Acknowledgements

Expert input: Patrick Fust, head of the ‘Stägestadt St.Gallen’ project group (<https://www.staegestadt.ch>)

These recommendations for daily physical activity were developed by the FOPH as part of the implementation of the NCD strategy (with the support of the Federal Office of Public Health, Health Promotion Switzerland and the Swiss Conference of Health Directors).

Federal Office of Public Health FOPH
Prevention of Non-communicable diseases Division

November 2024

