

Incidental Activity and Fitness Trackers

Placing parameters around planned physical activity completed at a gym is essential, but it is also important to assess and discuss unplanned incidental activity and the use of fitness trackers with someone who might be suffering from disordered eating or exercise behaviours.

Incidental activity refers to unstructured physical activity that takes place during the day such as:

- Walking to and from places
- Climbing the stairs
- Doing housework or any other activities of daily living.

These types of movement, although low intensity, still contribute to energy expenditure and if done excessively can lead to weight loss, and place excessive wear on joints that may already be

Additionally the use of fitness trackers have increased with public health messages of 'move more, sit less', and the suggested target of accumulating 10,000 steps per day. While these devices have helped sedentary people become more active, they may be detrimental to those with an eating or exercise disorders. This is because an individual may feel driven to complete their set amount of steps, regardless of any internal cues such as pain or fatigue, and may be done in addition to their formal workout.

Managing this aspect of exercise may be more challenging because of its unstructured nature, however the following guidelines can help those understand what a normal amount of incidental exercise is:

- Australian Guidelines for **Physical Activity recommend 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity each day**, such as walking. This includes incidental walking in bouts of as little as 10 minutes, accrued throughout the day. Doing more than this may harm your health if you are already physically compromised.
- Try different ways to track fitness progress without the use of technology. For example, **rate how much energy you have, what your mood is like, and how in touch you felt with your body** during the exercise.
- Sitting throughout the day to complete tasks at work, home, or school is healthy and normal. Standing and moving once per hour is sufficient to keep your body from getting stiff. Taking a **5-minute stretch break promotes blood flow around the body and boosts concentration.**
- It's more important to **listen to and respect your body** than it is to hit an exercise target.
- Be mindful of how much 'active transport' you do throughout the day. If you ride your bike or walk to work this counts towards your daily exercise and workouts should be adjusted to ensure you aren't overtraining.
- Incidental activity also burns energy, make sure you are supporting your body with appropriate amounts of food and water.
- Even if you are overweight, **it's important not to overdo incidental activity** (i.e. several hours per day) as it can wear and tear on your joints when done in excess.
- Use incidental activity as a way to be social instead of purely burning calories.

Focusing on numbers such as the calories burned, steps taken, or active minutes throughout the day, can perpetuate and maintain compulsive exercise behaviour.