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## Sports and physical activity during (COVID-19) pandemic

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### Abstract

Gripped in the turbulence of the COVID19 pandemic and quarantined within our safe spaces, how do we add quality to our current situation? Do we continue any kind of sports activity at home?, as all of us know Regular exercises offer countless benefits. It boosts your immune system, improves bone health and lowers health risks like heart problem, diabetes and many more life threatening diseases. UAE one of the leading countries in implementing virtual sports activities at home space. The World Health Organization and a number of other stakeholders emphasize the role of physical activity during COVID-19 response.

**Keywords:** Sports, physical education, COVID-19, home space, virtual sports

### Introduction

The extensive social distancing policies put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 mean most people will have to spend much, if not all, their time at home. Self-isolation means far fewer opportunities to be physically active if you are used to walking or cycling for transportation and doing leisure time sports. But equally worryingly, the home environment also offers abundant opportunity to be sedentary (sitting or reclining).

While self-isolation measures are necessary, our bodies and minds still need exercise to function well, prevent weight gain and keep the spirits up during these challenging times. Exercise can help keep our immune system become strong, less susceptible to infections and their most severe consequences, and better able to recover from them. So we should consider ways to limit the effects of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, as well as its wider impact of contributing to the long-term chronic disease crisis.

Global recommendations are for all adults to accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week, as well as muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days a week. Any activity is better than none, and more activity provides more physical and mental health benefits. As several countries are already under lockdown, it is uncertain for how long you can go outside for a walk, run or cycle. The key question is how can people meet these guidelines when restricted to the home environment?

We can take regular breaks from continuous sitting in front of your computer, tablet, or smartphone every 20 to 30 minutes. For example, you could take a few minutes break to walk around the house, take some fresh air on the balcony, in the garden or yard, or play with your dog for a few moments. Also we can use alternate periods of standing while working/studying with sitting by creating your own stand-up desk area.

Using the stairs is an extremely time-efficient way to maintain fitness. As little as three 20-second fast stair climbs a day can improve fitness in only six weeks. If you live in an apartment, avoid uncomfortable lift encounters with other self-isolating neighbors by using the staircase for any necessary outdoor journeys. Take care to avoid much contact with handrails. Internal stairs also offer more stairclimbing and strength exercise opportunities <sup>[1]</sup>.

A 2018 British study found home based strength exercises that utilize your own bodyweight – such as press-ups, sit-ups and planks – are as important for health as aerobic exercise <sup>[2]</sup>. There are many great resources for such indoor bodyweight exercises for people of all ages available online. Aim for at least a couple of own bodyweight sessions per week, with each session

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involving two to four sets of eight to 15 repetitions of each strength-promoting exercise. Make sure you take a two to three minutes rest between sets.

Exercise at home using various safe, simple, and easily implementable exercises is well suited to avoid the airborne coronavirus and maintain fitness levels. Such forms of exercise may include, but are not limited to, strengthening exercises, activities for balance and control, stretching exercises, or a combination of these. Examples of home exercises include walking in the house and to the store as necessary, lifting and carrying groceries, alternating leg lunges, stair climbing, stand-to-sit and sit-to-stand using a chair and from the floor, chair squats, and sit-ups and pushups. In addition, traditional Tai Ji Quan, Qigong exercises<sup>[3]</sup>, and yoga<sup>[4]</sup> should be considered since they require no equipment, little space, and can be practiced at any time. The use of eHealth and exercise videos, which focuses on encouraging and delivering physical activity through the Internet, mobile technologies, and television<sup>[5]</sup> are other viable avenues for maintaining physical function and mental health during this critical period.

With the continuing coronavirus pandemic, the public has been advised by various health authorities to reduce traveling and stay at home as a basic means of limiting people's exposure to the virus. Health authorities, including the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China,<sup>[6]</sup> WHO,<sup>[7]</sup> and U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,<sup>[8]</sup> have issued safety recommendations for taking simple precautions to reduce exposure to and transmission of the virus. Unfortunately, the mandated restrictions on travel and directives against participating in outdoor activities, including regular physical activity and exercise, will inevitably disrupt the routine daily activities of tens of millions of people.

With millions across the world under lockdown or restricted by critically important social distancing measures to curb the spread of the disease, images of footballers driving for goal, athletes straining toward the finish line and victory celebrations have been replaced with empty stadiums and silent, deserted streets. This goliath challenge has affected all aspects of our lives, including robbing us of the social, physical, educational and health benefits that sport has to offer<sup>[9]</sup>.

Pro sports leagues have suspended or canceled their seasons. Gyms across the country have gone dark. Teleworkers sweat to the instructions of online fitness experts in their own homes. Sports and social exercise, as we know them, are over. Recent instructions from federal, state and local governments for containing the coronavirus include avoiding gatherings of more than 10 people, which would include many outdoor amateur sports<sup>[10]</sup>

With Education Institutions across the region closed until end of the Academic year because of the coronavirus pandemic, that is a hurdle physical education teachers are trying different ways to overcome. Generally physical education, by its very name, implies a physical presence, how does one teach a physical activity-based class in a world suddenly gone virtual?<sup>[11]</sup>

Governments back a virtual sport and physical activity digital programs to keep students active during the period of schools, colleges and universities closures. The weekly programs included a variety of activities such as fitness, personal challenges, online contests, problem solving games and those which support physical competence, and mindfulness. The emphasis of the programs was on fun and wellbeing, many

virtual sports activities was available online daily by people like Joe Wicks and organizations like the Premier League and the National Governing Bodies of Sport<sup>[12]</sup>.

### **Global Initiatives for virtual sports**

After the Body Coach Joe Wicks became PE teacher to millions of children across the world, a UK-government backed campaign has been launched to keep everyone active during the coronavirus lockdown. Many countries are offering a large number of indoor workout options online through the campaign Join the Movement for people of all ages. The workouts included some that are targeted at elderly and less mobile people<sup>[13]</sup>.

### **Local Initiatives for virtual sports in UAE**

UAE as usual has the initiative to start a wide range of virtual sports and physical activities at home, the below initiatives are samples for the virtual sports

#### **1. Dubai Sports Council organized 'Be Fit, Be Safe' 'Virtual Marathon**

Dubai hosted its first-ever "Home Marathon", with more than 700 runners from 62 different nationalities across the globe participating, by turning their houses into a 42.195 km arena. Dubai Sports Council (DSC), in collaboration with Asics Middle East and 5:30 Run club, have come up with an exciting new initiative, the Marathon at Home, as part of its 'Be Fit, Be Safe' and #stayhome campaigns. The latest initiative is designed to keep members of UAE's community in running shape inside their home.

Participants are free to decide on the shape of their running course, but running on a treadmill or any other training equipment is not allowed. Running in public areas is also not allowed – running must be done physically on ground, and inside the house. Participants have to ensure they have a fully charged smartwatch or smartphone on them, with the Strava app installed and activated. They will have to join the "Marathon at Home" group on Strava and stay connected as the app will detect their movement and will assist in keeping track of their timing and distance traveled<sup>[14]</sup>.

#### **2. Abu Dhabi Sports Council #Stay At Home Virtual Run**

The first #StayHome #StaySafe opportunity to complete a virtual run was between Friday morning April 17 and Saturday afternoon April 18. Registration was 'FREE' online and after registration the participants got a link to upload their run details post run. The virtual run allows everyone to run at any time and on any route as long it is in your home - on a treadmill, in the garden, around and around your lounge - your choice. Then upload your time to the run as verification for ranking on the post registration email sent to each participant<sup>[15]</sup>.

#### **3. ADNOC Abu Dhabi Virtual Marathon**

The ADNOC Abu Dhabi Virtual Marathon - a 42.2k virtual running challenge that you can run your own way for a chance to win entry to the ADNOC Abu Dhabi Marathon. The aim of the challenge is to complete the distance of a full Marathon before the 31st May in as many runs as you feel comfortable and in return you'll receive a 20% discount voucher for the ADNOC Abu Dhabi Marathon. That's not all - everyone who completes the distance will also be entered into a draw to win free entry to the race<sup>[16]</sup>.

#### 4. Stay At Home FBMA Ladies Run

The first #StayHome #StaySafe opportunity to complete a LADIES ONLY virtual run was held on Wednesday 15th of April 2020. You can choose from either a 3Km, 5Km or 10Km run. Register was FREE online. The virtual run allows you to run at any time and on any route as long as it is in your home - on a treadmill, in the garden or around and around your lounge - your choice <sup>[17]</sup>.

#### 5. RAK Medical and Health Sciences University (Stay Home, Be Fit) Virtual Mini Marathon

It is our responsibility to support the government and country in promoting "Stay Home in order to Stay Safe". These challenging situations inspired all sectors in UAE to think out of the box. Dubai Sports Council has the initiative to start the Marathon at home 42 km which was held on 10th April 2020. In order to achieve and maintain an active & healthy lifestyle, while still staying at home for all RAKMHSU members ( Faculty , Staff and Students) , we came up with the idea of organizing a 'Home Mini Marathon 5 km , 10 and 15 km (3.1mile, 6.2 mile and 9.3 miles) .The main goal of this event is to show that RAKMHSU family can overcome any challenge.

Our half marathon race at home was opened to all categories male and female, was held on Saturday 18th April between 8am and 6pm UAE time, with a 10-hour time cap. Any RAKMHSU member can participate in the race even if he is outside UAE. It's not only run but you can participate with fast walking or jogging.

#### Conclusion

With the continuing coronavirus pandemic, Sport has the power to change the world; it is a fundamental right, a powerful tool to strengthen social ties and promote sustainable development and peace and well as solidarity, and respect. Through our unique individual skills and collective power, we can come together and share creative ways to improve our health and well-being through sport and physical activity – even from the confines of our own homes <sup>[18]</sup>.

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