**Step up exercise regimen to beat chronic diseases**

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People’s engagement in physical activity needs to be at least five times higher than current WHO recommendations to reduce risks of diseases like cancer, diabetes and stroke, suggests new research that included data from India.

Researchers are calling for a major boost to physical activity recommendations, with the study linking more exercise to a reduced risk of five common diseases.

Lennert Veerman from University of Queensland in Australia said a significant boost to physical activity level recommendations to the equivalent of 15 to 20 hours of brisk walking or six to eight hours of running a week could reduce breast and bowel cancer, diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

“Although the first minutes of activity do most for health, our research results suggest activity needs to be several times higher than current World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations to achieve larger reductions in risks of these diseases,” Mr. Veerman said.

“WHO advises a minimum total physical activity level of 10 metabolic equivalent of tasks (MET) hours a week, but the study found health gains accumulated up to levels of 50 to 70 MET-hours a week,” he said.

The ‘metabolic equivalent of tasks’ is a concept developed in the 1990s and adopted more recently by the WHO. Metabolism is the conversion of food and drink into energy. When we are at rest — watching television, for example — we have a metabolic rate of ‘one’.

Using this as a baseline, scientists assign values to different activities depending on how much energy they consume.

Strolling at a leisurely pace, for example, burns up twice the energy as sitting still, which gives it a value of MET 2. Vigorous running is a MET 8 activity.

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This scale makes it possible to compare the two: 10 minutes of running is the equivalent of 40 minutes of walking.

“We still do not definitively know the exact type and quantity of activity that most reduces the risk of common conditions because it is difficult to accurately measure physical activity,” said Mr. Veerman, who collaborated with researchers from the University of Washington and Dartmouth College.

Researchers used data from the Study on Global Ageing and Adult Health (SAGE) conducted in six countries — China, Ghana, India, Mexico, Russia, and South Africa — from 2007 to 2010, and additional data from the U.S. National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES) from 1999 to 2011.

“By analysing the results of 174 studies published between 1980 and 2016, we found higher levels of weekly physical activity were linked to reduced risk in all five common chronic conditions,” Mr. Veerman said.

He said most people could achieve 10 MET-hours per week by running for 75 minutes or two and a half hours of walking per week.

“People may need to incorporate additional daily activity to achieve 50 MET-hours,” Mr. Veerman added.

“This could mean being more active at work, doing housework, using stairs where possible, gardening or running, and using active transport such as walking or cycling,” he said. — PTI/AFP