



*Towards an 'active'  
policy*

Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport  
Sport, Exercise and Health

# *Sport and exercise are good for your health*

Exercise has a positive effect on people's health, fitness and general wellbeing. It can prevent and speed up recovery from illness, and help people with work-related complaints lead a normal life again. Studies show that in the Netherlands eight-thousand people die each year because they do not get enough exercise. Lack of exercise accounts for fifty percent of all cases of heart and vascular disease and is a major cause of obesity.

Sport and an active lifestyle are therefore important for your health. But they can also pose a threat, in the form of injuries or the use of doping. Both need to be prevented and, where necessary, treated.

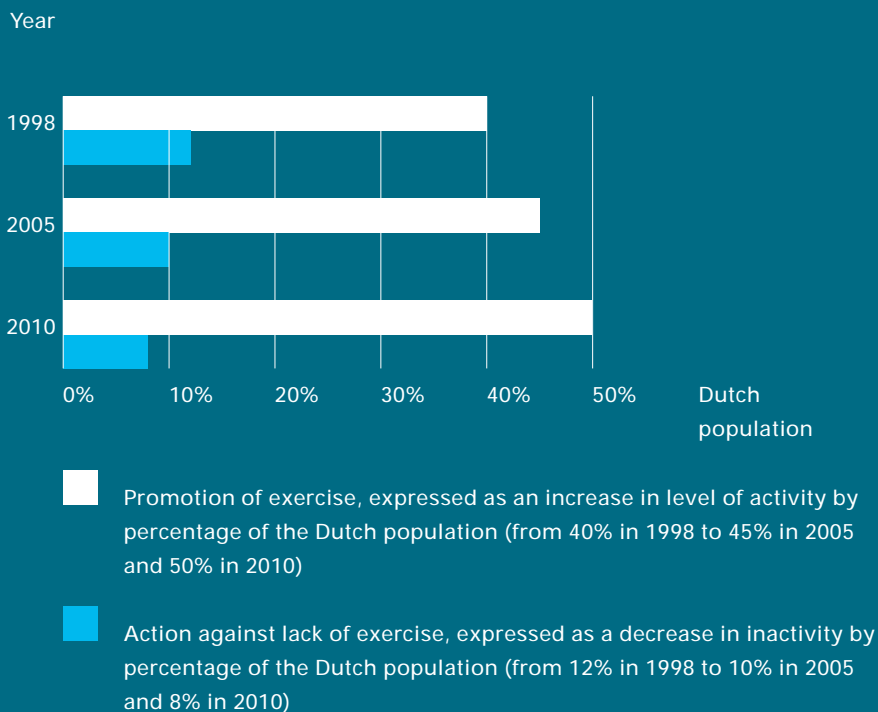
For all these reasons, the government decided to examine the relationship between sport, exercise and health, and to look at the position of sports medicine. The result was the paper entitled Sport, Exercise and Health in which it set out the principles underpinning the policy to be pursued by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport on the subject.

## *An active lifestyle*

In order to improve overall health levels, the aim is for everyone to take some form of exercise. One of the spearheads of policy is to promote greater public awareness of the importance of a healthy and active lifestyle, in the hope that people will start getting more exercise. To this end the government regularly launches campaigns and ensures that the public has access to sports facilities. According to the Dutch Standard for Healthy Exercise (NNGB, 1998), children must engage in intensive exercise for at least one hour a day, and adults in moderately intensive exercise for at least half an

hour a day on at least five days a week. The standard can be achieved not only through sport but also through 'everyday' activities such as walking, cycling, gardening, housework.

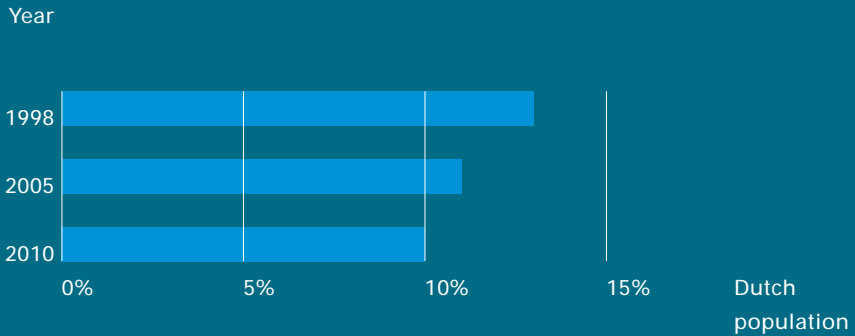
The objectives set out in the government paper are described in the figure below:



Policy not only targets people who do not meet the standard level of activity, but also specific groups, in specific contexts. Chronically ill, handicapped and elderly people as well as young people and people with work-related complaints all receive special attention. Of course, exercise programmes and campaigns have to be adapted to cater for the special needs of these groups.

## Safe sport and injury prevention

In order to obtain optimal health benefits from sport and exercise the government has also focused on injury prevention, and has defined the following objective:



- Reduction in the scale and frequency of injuries expressed as a decrease in the risk of injury (per sportsperson / per year) in percentages (from 13% in 1998 to 11% in 2005 and 10% in 2010)

### Initiatives include

- Nationwide activities aimed at increasing general awareness of the importance of preventive action and at encouraging the public to take it. They include the injury-free sport awareness campaign, the development of safety guidelines and the basic module on healthy and safe exercise.

- Local initiatives to support the national campaign, aimed at improving the quality of sports facilities and the advice given to people who engage in sport. The result is a greater understanding of injury prevention and a change in attitude and behaviour. Sport associations can also encourage clubs and trainers to introduce injury prevention measures. A support unit has been set up to which sports associations can turn if they have questions or need advice.

To determine whether the objective is being met, it is essential to keep a record of admissions for sports injuries to hospital casualty wards and to carry out regular surveys.

## *Sports medicine*

Improvements in the field of sports medicine can help to reduce the incidence of injuries and other sports-related complaints. Measures include:

- Promoting efforts to make services more efficient and recognisable
- Improving access to direct medical guidance for top athletes
- Making services and products available on the internet via the site [www.sportzorg.nl](http://www.sportzorg.nl) (in Dutch)
- Providing family doctors with training and advice to enhance their knowledge of and expertise in sports medicine
- Developing comprehensive and multi-disciplinary guidelines for sport-related complaints

## *Doping*

The harmful effects of performance-enhancing substances have made doping a priority issue for the government. Government policy is aimed at supporting sports organisations in promoting fair play through the Netherlands Centre for Doping Affairs (NeCeDo) and Doping Control Netherlands (DoCoNed). Together with these and other governmental and international bodies, the government has adopted the following measures to ensure that use of doping in sport is reduced both at the top and at recreational level:

- Promoting close cooperation between the organisations involved in Dutch anti-doping policy

- Supporting sports organisations by setting conditions with respect to their anti-doping policy
- Upgrading the quality of case law on doping by promoting the creation of a central disciplinary body
- Supporting and expanding information services for top athletes on substances designated as doping
- Dealing more effectively with illegal trade
- Promoting global cooperation through support and financial assistance
- Reaching mutual agreement on doping tests via the World Anti-Doping Code.

## *Research and monitoring*

There is not only a need for continual monitoring of the positive and negative impact of exercise and for the development and exchange of information on the subject but also for research. We need a greater understanding of the effectiveness and efficiency of measures aimed at promoting exercise in the treatment of chronic illness and work-related complaints, preventing and treating injuries, and preventing doping. This would provide a strong basis for the implementation of policy priorities and proposals. A research programme will be set up and implemented in the coming years on the advice of the Health Research Council (RGO).

## *Taking action together*

To put these policy priorities into effect, wider public support will be needed. To this end, the government will encourage cooperation between different sectors. After all, the objectives of the Dutch government are shared by other authorities, sports associations, health care, employers, health insurers, schools, private stakeholders and other bodies, not to mention individuals themselves. Central government wants to involve all of them in the development and implementation of policy. The aim is to ensure that all parties actively promote exercise, combat inactivity and obtain health benefits, so that people can become fitter and healthier and society as a whole can benefit.

The Sport, Exercise and Health project team, which was launched on 1 September 2002 for a period of 3 years, is responsible for implementing the government paper bearing the same name. The full text of the paper can be found on the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport's website (in Dutch), and a printed version can be ordered by phone. If you have further questions or comments after reading this brochure, or simply wish to exchange views on any of the above-mentioned topics, please contact the project team's secretariat.

**'Sport, Exercise and Health' secretariat:**

Phone +31 (070) 340 63 62

Fax +31 (070) 340 52 23

Published by  
Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

Visiting Address  
Parnassusplein 5  
2511 VX The Hague  
The Netherlands

Postal Address  
Sports Department  
Sport, Exercise and Health Project Team  
Postbus 20350  
2500 EJ The Hague  
The Netherlands

Public Information  
Phone +31 (0)70 340 7890

Website  
[www.minvws.nl](http://www.minvws.nl)

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