



1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



take care

WHAT IS IT?

Physical activity plays a central role in shaping the well-being of individuals. In our modern, fast-paced, interconnected world, various factors contribute to our health, safety and overall well-being. A holistic approach recognises that, for example, a balanced diet, avoidance of substance abuse and mindful screen usage have an undeniably positive effect on both physical and mental health.

Sport plays a pivotal role in achieving the World Health Organization's 2030 physical activity goals. **Scientific evidence underscores the power of football to prevent illness and injury among people of all ages, because it promotes an active lifestyle.** Parents and caregivers, teachers, coaches and staff are essential in supporting children and young people in this journey towards healthy habits.

The UEFA Take Care programme focuses on enhancing health and well-being through football. This white paper on physical activity uncovers the dangers of inactivity and celebrates the transformative benefits of sport and football in particular. It suggests practical actions that can be adapted to different contexts to seamlessly integrate movement into users' daily routines.

TAKE CARE PROGRAMME

The UEFA Take Care programme is composed of six interconnected modules:

- Physical activity
- Nutrition
- Mental health
- Digital addiction
- Substance awareness
- Road safety

In addition to a white paper like this one, each module is supported by several tools including posters, a podcast, a documentary and an educational session.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The programme and its tools are designed for national associations, leagues, clubs, other football stakeholders and schools. It is intended to be used by parents and caregivers, teachers, coaches and staff to benefit everyone, but especially children and young people.

HOW TO USE IT

A user guide is available to help football organisations and schools understand and maximise the use of these tools. Resources can be consulted independently on www.uefa.com/takecare, providing flexibility in learning and application. However, as the topics explored are interconnected, useful references can be found within the other tools.

- 1. Introduction**
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1. INTRODUCTION

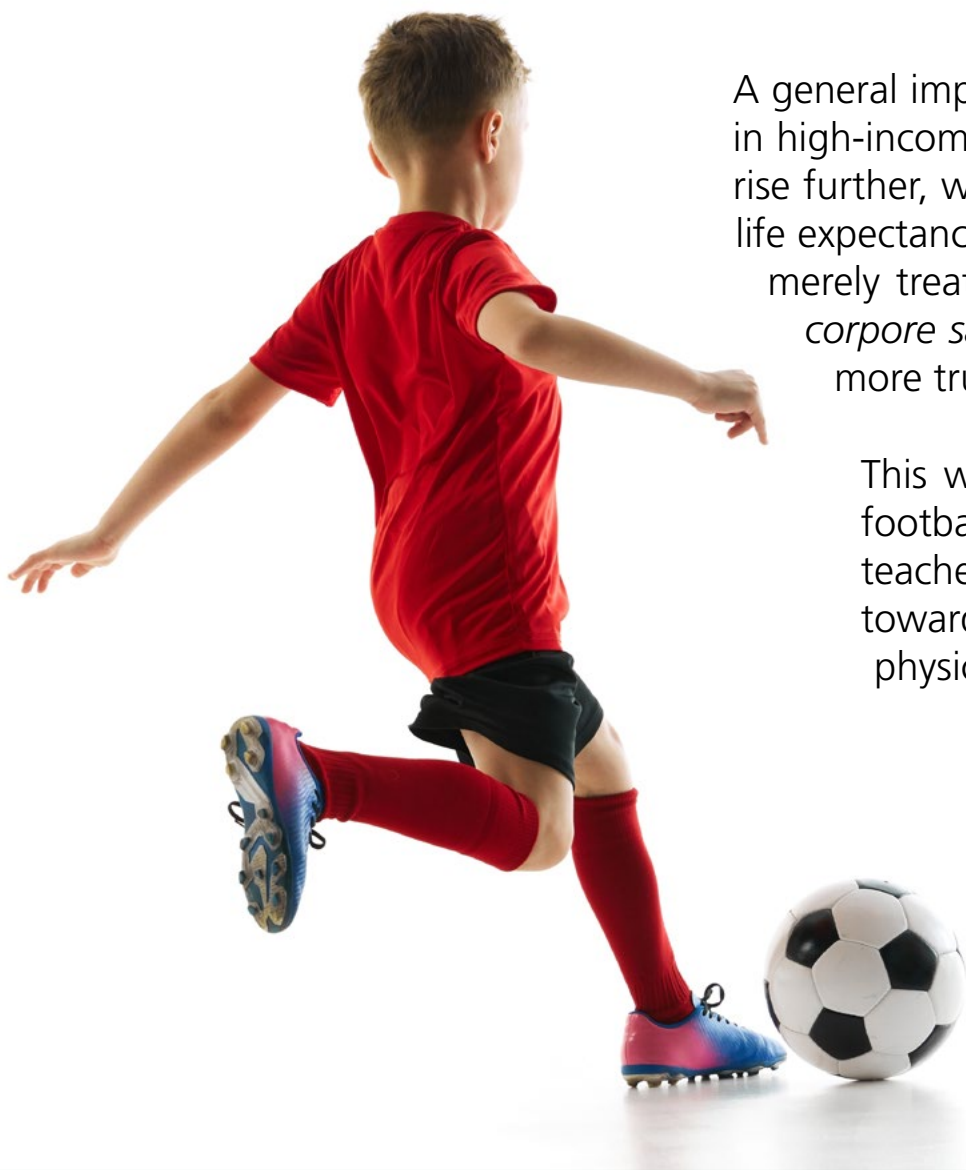
Sport and play are crucial elements in achieving the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2030 physical activity goals, as emphasised in its 2020 Guidelines Action Plan.¹ As **the most popular sport for children and adults worldwide**, football is an attractive way to promote participation in sport and a healthy, physically active lifestyle.^{2,3}

The concept of football and regular training as a preventive measure against poor health and an effective way to promote physical activity is supported by robust scientific evidence. It provides individuals of all ages with an opportunity to enhance their health through exercise.⁴

FOOTBALL BENEFITS PEOPLE BY FOSTERING GOOD HEALTH, TEAMWORK AND REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Furthermore, regular physical activity among older people, especially those with mobility difficulties, dementia or type 2 diabetes, has been shown to bring about **significant improvements** in social well-being, cardiovascular fitness, lower limb strength and balance, as well as a **reduction** in depression and anxiety.⁵

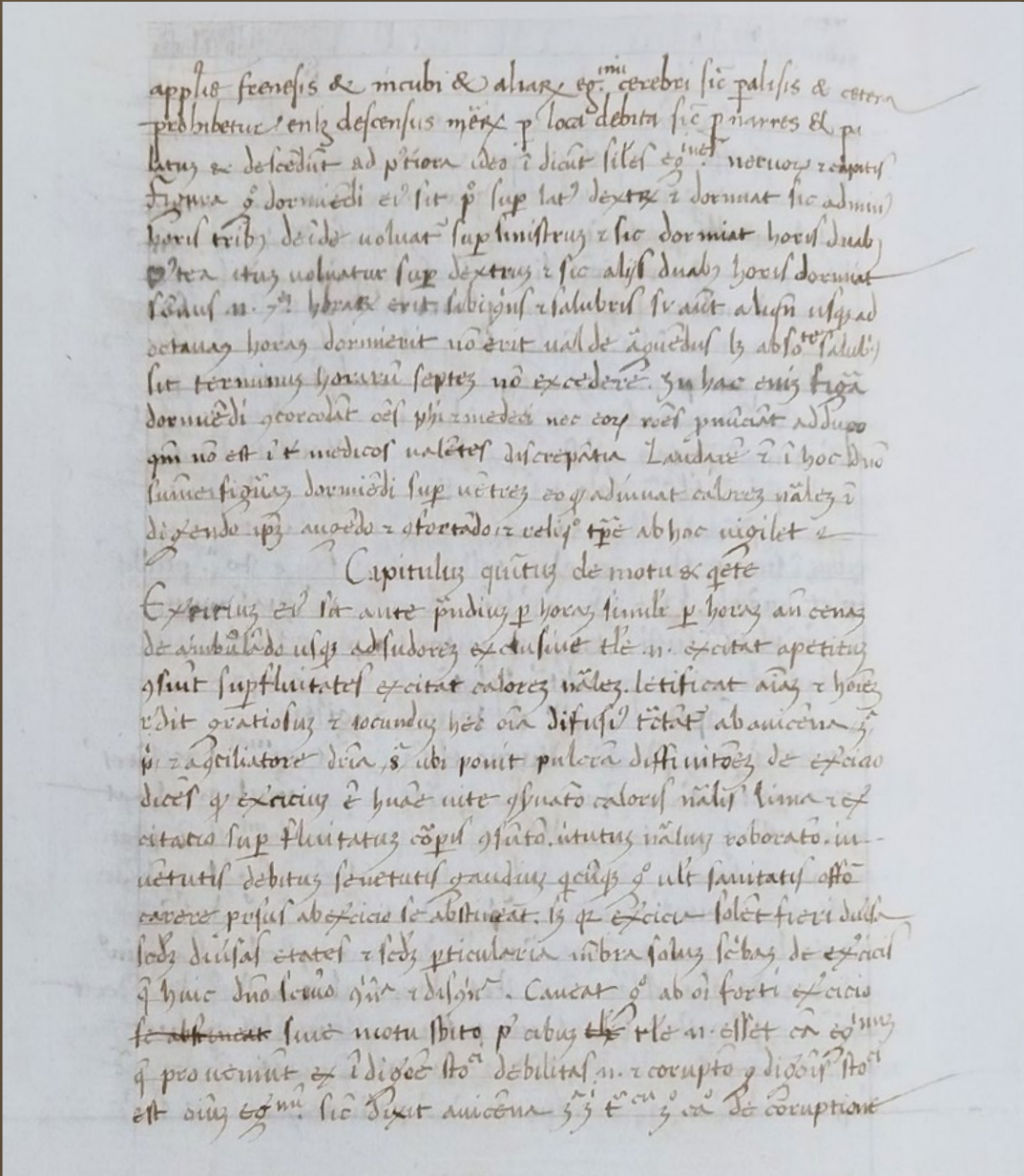




A general improvement in living conditions over the last two centuries has increased life expectancy, particularly in high-income countries.⁶ Due to advancements in modern medical treatment, human longevity is projected to rise further, with some countries reaching an average life expectancy **beyond 90 years** by 2030.⁷ Nonetheless, life expectancy and longevity depend on maintaining a healthy lifestyle.⁸ We need to change our approach from merely treating illness to prioritising healthy habits throughout our lives. The Latin expression *mens sana in corpore sano* underscores the importance of maintaining both mental and physical fitness, and this is even more true among ageing populations.

This white paper aims to encourage people to embrace sport, especially recreational and professional football, and to **promote an active lifestyle** for health and well-being. Parents and caregivers, teachers, coaches and staff are essential in supporting children and young people in this journey towards healthy habits. Here, we provide them with tools to enhance sports participation and increase physical activity levels.

**FOOTBALL SUPPORTS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S
HEALTH, TEAMWORK SKILLS, COMMUNICATION,
LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND SENSE OF BELONGING AND IDENTITY**



De conservanda sanitate, a fascinating Latin manuscript, captures the timeless wisdom of the 15th-century Italian physician Geremia Simeoni.

“Quicumque ergo vult sanitatis officio carere prorsus ab exercicio se absteineat.”

Translation: “Therefore, those who wish to deprive themselves of good health should abstain from all physical activity.”

Photo from the Biblioteca Guarneriana in San Daniele del Friuli

2. HOLISTIC LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT

Technological advancements have simplified many daily activities. However, convenient transportation, e-commerce, smart working and social media have been major factors in the adoption of a more sedentary lifestyle by many people. **Our bodies need exercise** to cope with different demands as we get older, so programmes and activities to provide opportunities to be active at different stages of life are fundamental.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT PROMOTE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT, ENHANCING BOTH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING^{5, 9}

Regular exercise releases endorphins, which alleviates stress, anxiety and depression. Team sports are also known for instilling cooperation, communication and leadership skills in young people, while individual sports teach self-discipline, goal-setting and resilience.¹⁰ But, more than that, physical activity and sport help to foster a sense of identity and belonging, providing a platform for **self-expression and self-discovery**.⁹ Parents and caregivers should be aware of these positive effects and should be involved in their children's sporting journey, as research has shown that this can increase their participation.^{9, 11}



SPORT HELPS PEOPLE FORGE LASTING FRIENDSHIPS, LEARN TO RESPECT DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW, AND DEVELOP EMPATHY AND COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

In this sense, football is often a great tool for building **inclusive and harmonious communities**. From a health perspective, physical activity improves [cardiorespiratory](#) and muscle fitness while also being crucial for [cardiometabolic](#) health, bone health and mental health. It also helps individuals to maintain an appropriate [body mass](#) and can contribute to preventing [diabetes](#) among children and young people.¹²



“Physical activity and sport help to foster a sense of identity and belonging, providing a platform for self-expression and self-discovery”



Regular and properly planned physical exercise tailored to the individual and their specific goals can have a positive impact on their **self-esteem and confidence**.

PARTICIPATING IN SPORT HELPS TO CULTIVATE CONSISTENCY, COMPETITIVENESS, RESPECT FOR RULES AND ROLES, EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT AND RESILIENCE UNDER PRESSURE

These skills are crucial for athletes at all levels and can also contribute to success in professional careers across various industries. Encouraging children to get involved in sport early in life can provide them with these **valuable developmental benefits**. Promoting physical activity from childhood to adolescence helps to reduce issues caused by unhealthy lifestyles and supports long-term well-being and longevity.¹³

3. ASSESSING THE RISKS

Around **500 million** people are expected to develop heart disease, [obesity](#), diabetes or other [non-communicable diseases](#) between 2020 and 2030.¹ Physical inactivity is one of the main causes of this. In fact, poor cardiorespiratory fitness and childhood obesity are associated with higher medical costs related to cardiometabolic health in later life.¹⁴

Physical activity is recommended to prevent non-communicable diseases,^{8, 16} making its inclusion in curricula and other programmes essential from childhood through adolescence. Teenagers, who represent nearly **one fifth** of the global population, are at a critical stage for reducing risk factors for future non-communicable diseases.¹³

BY 2030, 40 MILLION CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE ARE EXPECTED TO BE CLINICALLY OBESE, WHILE 254 MILLION ARE EXPECTED TO BE OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE IN THE 5–19 AGE CATEGORY¹⁵





80%
 OF ADOLESCENTS
 WORLDWIDE ARE NOT
 ACTIVE ENOUGH

Recent surveys show that about **80% of young people** worldwide are insufficiently active, spending much of their time sitting or lying down, often absorbed by their digital devices.¹³ These devices supplant real-life interactions and opportunities to learn new skill sets and build lasting connections with friends and family during a critical time for children's cognitive and social development. The WHO's 2020 guidelines advise **60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous aerobic activity daily for children and young people**,^{12, 17} though these recommendations must be adapted to individual needs.



RECENT SURVEYS
 INDICATE THAT
38% OF BOYS AND **46%**
 OF GIRLS NEVER WALK
 OR CYCLE TO SCHOOL¹³

WITH MORE THAN
9.4 WAKING HOURS
 SPENT INACTIVE PER DAY, OLDER
 ADULTS HAVE A PREDOMINANTLY
 SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE¹³

Physical activity should be balanced with other good habits for a healthy lifestyle, including:



GOOD SLEEP

Optimising sleep duration and quality helps maintain biological rhythms,¹⁹ improves mood, memory and concentration, regulates appetite and supports a healthy weight and cardiometabolic health.²⁰



A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH TECHNOLOGY

Despite increased screen time, mobile apps offer opportunities to boost physical activity among adolescents in high-income countries.^{13, 21}



SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Schools and other social, urban and digital environments influence children's physical activity.¹³ After-school sport is essential for physical, social and personal development, complementing educational efforts.^{13, 16, 18, 20}



ACTIVE TRAVEL

Walking or cycling to school or football practice is an easy opportunity for daily physical activity.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Sport promotes community, teamwork and inclusion and counteracts sedentary behaviour, thereby improving physical, mental and social well-being in early adolescence.^{9, 10, 11, 16, 20}



HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES

Nutrition goes hand in hand with physical activity as it has a direct impact on health and physical performance.



HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Social interactions significantly improve life and health by providing emotional support, bringing happiness and fostering a sense of belonging. Additionally, camaraderie and encouragement from others can help you to maintain a consistent exercise routine.



AVOIDING HARMFUL SUBSTANCES

Alcohol, tobacco, drugs and other addictive substances negatively affect endurance and physical performance while increasing the risk of injury.

4. PRACTICAL ACTIONS

FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

1 PROMOTE DAILY ACTIVITY by encouraging your children to set aside time each day for 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic activity



2 ENCOURAGE YEAR-ROUND ACTIVITY, including during school holidays



3 EXPOSE YOUR CHILDREN TO DIFFERENT ORGANISED SPORTS so that they can choose what they like best



4 PROVIDE THE RIGHT GEAR for each activity



5 TAKE AN ACTIVE INTEREST in your child's sporting journey, show enthusiasm by attending sports events and transmit a positive attitude to sport



6 ENCOURAGE HEALTHY NUTRITION and eating habits



7 BE AWARE OF AND DISCUSS THE RISKS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE and create a safe environment for open discussions

8

ALLOW TIME FOR RECOVERY and ensure that your children have a healthy sleep schedule.



9 REGULATE ELECTRONIC DEVICE USAGE to ensure that enough time is devoted to physical activity



10

ENCOURAGE HYDRATION before, during and after practice



4. PRACTICAL ACTIONS

FOR TEACHERS, COACHES AND STAFF



1

HELP CHILDREN DESIGN THEIR OWN FITNESS PROGRAMMES AND SET GOALS, even during school holidays



2

PROMOTE REGULAR, CONSISTENT PRACTICE and emphasise its benefits

3

PROVIDE REGULAR FEEDBACK to parents and children to help track development, which is key to progress



4

CREATE A POSITIVE, FUN AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT during practice to foster children's enthusiasm



5

ENCOURAGE HEALTHY NUTRITION and eating habits



6

BE AWARE OF AND DISCUSS THE RISKS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE and create a safe environment for open discussions



7

PRIORITISE RECOVERY and allow adequate time for it



8

REGULATE ELECTRONIC DEVICE USAGE to ensure that enough time is devoted to physical activity



9

INTEGRATE HYDRATION BREAKS into the training schedule



4. PRACTICAL ACTIONS

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1 SET GOALS and design a year-round fitness programme with the help of your coach, even during the holidays



2 EXPLORE VARIOUS SPORTS and continue those that you enjoy the most, as you're more likely to stay active if you're doing something you like

3 STAY ACTIVE ALL THE TIME by taking the stairs whenever possible and cycling or walking to school or training or around town



4 GET THE RIGHT GEAR for your activities

5 FIND INSPIRATION by following your favourite athletes and letting their journeys motivate you



6 FUEL YOUR BODY WITH NUTRITIOUS FOOD to support your practice



7 AVOID HARMFUL AND ADDICTIVE SUBSTANCES like alcohol and tobacco that can negatively affect your performance and increase the risk of injury

8 PRIORITISE RECOVERY and maintain a good sleep schedule, and follow the advice of your coach and your parent or caregiver in this respect



9 USE ELECTRONIC DEVICES WISELY before and after practice, and avoid using them during practice

10 MAKE SURE TO DRINK ENOUGH WATER before, during and after practice



5. GOOD PRACTICES

Launched in 2010, the **Football is Medicine** initiative aims to promote health through small-sided matches that involve young and elderly untrained participants from different countries. It has found that playing football reduces cardiovascular risk and so offers an alternative to traditional physician-guided counselling for sedentary and middle-aged people.^{4, 22}

Likewise, the **11 for Health** programme integrated an educational programme and active participation into association football for children and young people.^{2, 3} Notably, insights from a 12 to 16-week programme involving hour-long sessions two to three times per week resulted in improved performance, coordination and cardiorespiratory fitness among previously inactive children.³



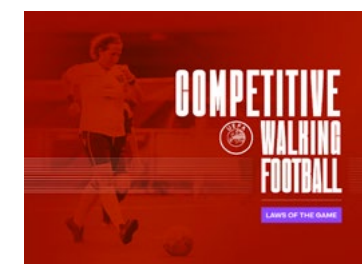
FOOTBALL TRAINING **THREE TIMES A WEEK** IMPROVES CHILDREN'S
PERFORMANCE, COORDINATION AND CARDIORESPIRATORY FITNESS



Walking football is a less intense but genuine alternative form of association football practice that can provide an opportunity for older people and those with mobility issues to participate in sport for as little as **an hour per week**,²⁴ aligning with [UEFA's Walking Football toolkit](#). Ideally, participation **two to three times per week** is recommended, with the objective of improving cardiovascular health, mobility, coordination and teamwork by offering a fun, moderate-impact and socially engaging physical activity.²³

FROM A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE, WALKING FOOTBALL HELPS BUILD CONNECTIONS AND A SENSE OF COMMUNITY WHILE FOSTERING A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND ACHIEVEMENT

Older people should spend at least **30 minutes** per day practising moderate-intensity physical activity.²⁴



Overall, the most sensible advice we can give everyone is to be proactive in embracing any kind of physical activity that they enjoy.

**EXERCISE NOT ONLY IMPROVES PHYSICAL FITNESS
BUT ALSO BOOSTS BRAIN FUNCTION AND COGNITIVE
ABILITY AMONG BOTH CHILDREN AND ADULTS**

Dr John Ratey's book *Spark* makes a compelling case for achieving health goals with minimal exercise to promote overall gains. Ratey conceptualised the 'smart jock' theory, which suggests that **20 to 30 minutes** of aerobic exercise before school has a positive impact on a child's cognitive function and readiness and capacity to learn. The theory was based on a study that involved **19,000** American students following a fitness-based programme as part of their school curriculum.²⁵

At the end of their studies, young people progress into professional careers, which is a major transition, and often the objective is to reach a high level in their chosen field. Evidence suggests that sports participation at any level fosters competitiveness and the ability to manage the demands of high performance and that it positively impacts psychosocial and professional development by teaching emotional management, goal-setting, optimism, resilience and self-determination.^{25, 26, 27}



**20
MINUTES
OF AEROBIC EXERCISE
BEFORE SCHOOL HAS
A POSITIVE IMPACT
ON LEARNING**

6. GLOSSARY

CARDIOMETABOLIC HEALTH

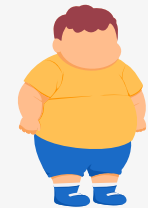
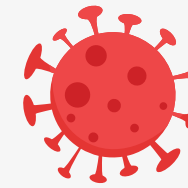
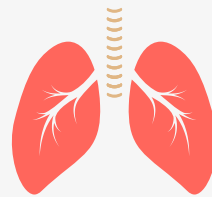
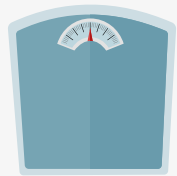
encompasses the well-being of both the heart and the metabolic system, including factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

DIABETES

is a disease characterised by elevated blood sugar (glucose) levels due to insufficient insulin production or ineffective use of insulin (the hormone needed to regulate blood sugar). Diabetes can present a wide range of symptoms from mild to severe, making early detection essential.

NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

refers to a medical condition that is not infectious and cannot be transmitted from one person to another. Examples of non-communicable diseases include heart disease, diabetes and cancer.



BODY MASS

refers to the total mass or weight of an individual's body.

CARDIORESPIRATORY HEALTH

involves how well your heart and lungs work together to supply oxygen to your body during physical activity.

GLUCOSE

refers to the sugar present in the blood. It is an essential source of energy, but maintaining a safe blood sugar level is crucial.

OBESITY

refers to an abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat that presents a risk to health and can lead to complications such as diabetes or heart disease.

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