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## 42% of S. Koreans report weight gain as result of pandemic

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**Health Ministry recommends people walk up to 150 minutes per week**

Photo provided by Getty Images

South Koreans face a growing risk of obesity as routine physical activity slumps amid the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting public health authorities to strongly urge people to take regular walks. Their recommendation is at least 150 minutes a week of brisk walking that's still slow enough to hold a conversation, or 75 minutes a week of walking at a pace too fast for conversation.

On Oct. 25, the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MOHW) and Korea Health Promotion Institute (KHPI) shared the recommendations as part of their "walking guidelines for Koreans." Regular walking reduces the risk of death and obesity and is effective at lowering the risk of disease, including eight forms of cancer, heart disease, senility, and diabetes. Another advantage is that it can be practiced anywhere and at any time while still observing social distancing guidelines.

According to the findings of a KHPI survey on "health investment perceptions" conducted with 1,031 South Korean adults this year, 32.9% of respondents said they were "unable to engage in sufficient physical activity due to COVID-19," while 42.1% of them named "weight gain" as a lifestyle change since the start of the pandemic. The numbers suggest the pandemic is one more negative factor added onto a recent situation where the obesity rate among South Korean adults had already risen from 30.9% to 34.6% between 2014 and 2018, while the rate of physical activity had fallen from 58.3% to 47.6% over the same period.

The guidelines call for at least 150 minutes of fast walking or 75 minutes of very fast walking per week for adults. When walking at different speeds, two minutes of fast walking can be considered equivalent to one minute of very fast walking. Proper posture is as important as the volume of exercise, as it relieves tension in the shoulders and neck and prevents pain in the lower back and pelvis. The recommended guidelines for proper posture include directing the gaze 10 to 15 meters directly ahead, breathing naturally through the nose and out of the mouth, bringing the jaw slightly in toward the chest and angling the upper body five degrees forward, keeping the body straight with the shoulders and chest spread, allowing the arms to swing naturally with the elbow gently bent in an L-shape or V-shape, walking with the arms in parallel rather than pointing inward, and walking in such a way that the knees seem to gently brush together.

For the sake of COVID-19 prevention, the guidelines advise wearing a mask and maintaining a distance of two meters from others. In cases of difficulty breathing, people are advised to move to a setting with no one else around and temporarily remove their mask to catch their breath.

By Lee Yu-jin, staff reporter

Please direct comments or questions to [english@hani.co.kr]

routine, prompt, urge, perception, guideline, for the sake of

Have you gained weight? If you have gained weight, do you intend to lose it?

How many minutes do you walk a week?

Are you concerned about not getting enough exercise?

How has your exercise routine changed because of COVID-19?

What is one lifestyle change you would like to make?

My friend urges me to .....

I urge my parents to .....

For the sake of maintaining friendships, I don't .....



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## Lessons from Estonia: why it excels at digital learning during Covid

Studies in the Baltic state moved seamlessly online thanks to its early adoption of education technology

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**Sally Weale** *Education correspondent*

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**A**s hundreds of thousands of children in the UK found themselves shut out of education during lockdown, without access to a laptop or internet, pupils in Estonia reaped the rewards of the Baltic country's long-term investment in digital learning.

Long before coronavirus began to wreak havoc on the world, Estonia made the development of digital skills, high-speed internet and a sophisticated IT infrastructure a national priority.

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In 2001, it was one of the first countries in the world to classify internet access as a human right.

Estonian schools have been using digital study materials and electronic school management systems for years, so when the pandemic hit and schools were forced to close in Tallinn, Estonian children went home where their studies moved seamlessly online.

In the UK, by contrast, online education during lockdown was patchy, with children's learning determined mainly by digital access. Teachers have had to rapidly develop new digital skills, and the government's laptop scheme to provide kit to disadvantaged children in England has been criticised as too little, too late.

"It has not been a piece of cake," said Taavi Kreitsmann, a headteacher in Estonia. "But in many ways we are definitely in a more fortunate situation than others." Kreitsmann is the head of Tartu Erakool, a school for seven- to 13-year-olds in Tartu, a city in the east of the country.

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Way before Covid, all 340 students at Kreitsmann's school had their own iPads, centrally managed by the school and used routinely to deliver and learn lessons, and children were used to occasional online study days, where they worked from home rather than in the school building while their teachers were involved in other tasks.

Admittedly, Tartu Erakool is private and may be better equipped than other schools, but since Estonia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the country's ambitious young leaders have thrown themselves into the challenge of creating a digital state, with education at the heart of their plans.

In 1997, a project called *Tiigrihüpe* (the Tiger Leap) was launched to provide computers and internet access for schools, and vital digital training for teachers. "Estonia has been preparing for digital education for years," said Laura Limperk-Kütaru, the head of Estonia's



international relations department. "For us this transformation to distance learning was not something new."

Before the pandemic, most Estonian schools were routinely using digital study materials, including a platform of digital books called *Opiq* and electronic school management systems such as *eKool*, which connect pupils, parents and teachers. "All these systems have been set up for years now," said Limperk-Kütaru. When Covid closed school buildings, "it was just moving from classrooms to a virtual environment".

Not every child in Estonia had access to a laptop or tablet, but where they did not, schools, local authorities and voluntary organisations stepped in. A team of university-trained "educational technologists" who are based in schools worked with teachers to ensure the best use of digital resources.

The results so far are positive. "Teachers at schools were able to reach out to almost all children," said Limperk-Kütaru, who is confident there has not been significant learning loss. "Currently we have not seen much difference from other years." In England, there are fears that 10 years of progress in narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers may have been wiped out by Covid.

Estonia has not only done well during lockdown, it has established itself in recent years as the new education powerhouse of Europe, outperforming even Finland in the international Pisa tests. With a population of just 1.3 million, the educational challenges Estonia faces are very different from those in the UK, but its digital success may hold lessons for other countries.

Andreas Schleicher is the head of education and skills at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, where he also oversees the international Pisa tests. Asked why Estonia's move to remote learning has been so successful compared with the UK's, he said: "The key difference is that teachers and school leaders in Estonia are used to working as designers of innovative learning environments, and have great flexibility on how to best configure the people, the spaces, the technology and times in their respective context.

"It goes back to when Estonia became independent. Unlike other countries in the region, they didn't try to restore the old system but had a young generation of entrepreneurs create an entirely new public system with entrepreneurship and digitalisation at its heart."

The pandemic has reinforced Estonia's commitment to digital education, and with disruption to school-based education likely to continue, other countries will follow suit. "Many things will never be the same again," said Kreitsmann, "and education is one of those things."

**Since you're here ...**

excel, wreak havoc, priority, be a piece of cake, throw oneself into, transformation, step in, reach out to, reinforce

What do you know about Estonia?

Do you think Korea has done a good job educating children online?

What should be the national priority in education right now?

Do you think internet access is a human right? In your opinion, what is the most important human right?

What adjectives would you use to describe Mokwon's online education?

Would you like for there to be a hybrid of distance learning and classroom instruction?

What would you like to say to your high school teachers?

I know someone who excels at .....

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc with .....

..... is a piece of cake.

I once had to step in and ..... in order to help a friend.