

# Exercise

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If you're like most people, you've started - and quit - several exercise programs. Maybe your plan was too ambitious or demanding for a beginner. Perhaps it got too expensive. Or maybe it was just boring.

But the stakes are too high for you to stop trying. About 12% of all deaths occur at least in part because of lack of physical activity. In addition, sedentary people have twice the risk of heart attack and dying of a heart attack than people who exercise regularly. But, 58% of adult Americans get no exercise or only occasional exercise. As a risk factor for heart disease, physical inactivity is equal to smoking, high blood pressure, obesity and high cholesterol.

However, the latest research on exercise shows that even moderate activity, like taking a brisk walk, improves your physical and psychological well-being. The bottom line message is this - some exercise is better than none, and more exercise is better the some.

## Benefits of exercise

Medically, exercise stimulates blood flow and tissue growth in muscle and bone. It also relieves the fatigue of nervous tension and is a powerful tool in promoting good health and preventing disease. It can help you by: burning fat; lowering blood pressure; preventing bone loss and osteoporosis; reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes; reducing stress and anxiety; building muscles and boosting metabolism; and improving physical fitness and overall well-being.

## Types of exercise

The most important type of exercise is *aerobic*, which means that it requires oxygen. After age 20, your capacity to take in and use oxygen decreases by about 1% per year. This capacity to use oxygen is referred to as *aerobic capacity* and is a key gauge of a persons fitness level. Exercises can also be rated according to whether they strengthen primarily the upper or lower body. However, there is no single activity that does it all. The best way to exercise your entire body is to pair two to three different activities which together exercise your whole body and make exercise more practical and fun. Its up to you to start with your favorite exercise and pair it with something that makes sense for you. If your

preferred workout tones the upper body, do a second that livens up your legs. If your are usually doing something nonaerobic (golf, bowling, gardening, or weight training), combine it with a more aerobic activity (walking, running, bicycling, or swimming). The possibilities are endless. The rewards are too.

### The 5 Exercises Easiest on your Body

1. Swimming
2. Walking
3. Yoga
4. Bicycling
5. Cross-country skiing

### The 5 Best Lower Body Exercises

1. Bicycling
2. Weight training
3. Aerobic dance
4. Cross-country skiing
5. Running

### The 5 Exercises Easiest to Start Doing

1. Walking
2. Bicycling
3. Gardening
4. Aerobic dance
5. Swimming

### The 5 Best Upper Body Exercises

1. Weight training
2. Swimming
3. Yoga
4. Cross-country skiing
5. Gardening

### The 5 Best Aerobic Exercises

1. Cross-country skiing
2. Running
3. Bicycling
4. Aerobic dance
5. Swimming

## Getting started

There is a distinct difference between exercise for health and the heavy training programs athletes go through to become competitive. It is important to understand that improving overall health and well-being need not be a burdensome undertaking but may only require slight changes in current day to day routines.

Any activity is better than nothing. Simply being as active as you can, as often as you can, makes a big health difference. One or two minutes of activity here and there throughout the day can add up to the recommended minimum of 30 minutes of activity per day. Some simple ways to be more active include: parking your car at the far end of the parking lot, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking to the store, and playing with your children rather than watching TV together.

For most people who are new to exercise, walking is a great way to start. If you have a good pair of walking shoes, you can start today. Keep your goals reasonable. If you've been relatively sedentary, don't think about any time or distance goals - yet. Start with a walking pace and distance that you're comfortable with. Then over the next 3-6 months, try to work up the intensity and duration of the activity. Don't increase your time or distance by more than 10% a week.

The trick to successful exercise is to begin with small changes that you can manage - from walking around the block, to walking to the store, to going on daily walks.

## The exercise prescription

The exercise prescription is for a routine of regular physical activity for health - not for athletic fitness or performance. It is equally important to perform stretching exercises before and after any physical activity; their purpose is to prevent muscle strains, and when performed regularly, they also increase flexibility, strength, and circulation. The basic parts of an exercise prescription are contained in the abbreviation **FITT** - Frequency of the activity, Intensity of the exercise, Type of physical activity, and Time spent doing that activity.

- **Frequency** - Improvement in aerobic capacity requires that exercise be done at least three times a week. Ideally, some exercise should be done daily.

- **Intensity** - Exercising at 60-75% of the estimated maximum heart rate (calculated by subtracting the patient's age in years from 220) is considered best. While lower intensity programs may be helpful for burning calories, they require a greater time commitment. However, low intensity exercising may be extremely helpful for reducing anxiety and improving the sense of well-being. Rather than trying to maintain a particular heart rate it is often simpler to exercise at a level of activity which is perceived as being "moderately hard" which usually closely corresponds to 75% of maximum heart rate.

- **Type** - Exercise should be enjoyable and convenient without aggravating existing medical conditions. It should be stressed that everyday activities are also part of any exercise program.

- **Time** - For maximal aerobic benefit, each exercise session should last for 30 to 60 minutes. However, several 10 minute spurts can be equally effective. A minimum of 30 minutes per day of accumulated moderately intense physical activity is recommended for all adults on most days of the week.

## Risks of exercise

The most common risk in exercising is injury to the muscles and joints. This usually happens from exercising too hard or for too long - particularly if a person has been inactive for some time. However, most of these injuries can be prevented by building up your level of activity slowly and listening to your body for early warning pains.

If precautions are not taken during hot, humid days, *heat exhaustion* or *heat stroke* can occur - although they are fairly rare. Both can be avoided if you drink enough liquids to replace those lost during exercise.

Most people have also read about famous people who have died while exercising. These deaths are usually caused by overexertion in people who already had heart conditions. In people under age 30, these are usually congenital heart defects. In people over age 40, coronary artery disease (which causes heart attacks) is usually the cause. Many of these deaths have been preceded by warning signs such as chest pain, lightheadedness, fainting, and extreme breathlessness. These symptoms should not be ignored and should be brought to the attention of your doctor.

At the moderate levels of exercise recommended, there is no need for medical testing for people of any age as long as they are in good health. Moderate exercise is defined as 60 to 75% of the maximum predicted heart rate (220 - age). More simply, this is equal to a level of activity that is perceived as being moderately hard. However, for those patients with known heart disease or multiple risk factors for heart attack, especially in men over 40 and women over 50 (smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, diabetes, family history), a medical examination before starting a new moderate to heavy exercise program is recommended.

### In summary

- Exercise improves quality of life at all ages.
- Moderate regular physical activity protects against chronic diseases. It may also prolong life.
- Some exercise is better than none, and more exercise is better the some.