

# Safe Exercise for People with Heart Disease

## How will exercise help me if I have heart disease?

People who are physically active have a lower risk of a heart attack than those who are not active. If you have been diagnosed with heart disease or have had heart surgery, exercise can help keep your condition under control. Exercise improves your energy level and confidence. It helps your heart and the rest of your body get stronger and work better. A few months of regular exercise will make your heart muscle pump more blood with less work and use oxygen better.

## What kinds of exercise should I do?

Always talk about your exercise program with your healthcare provider to make sure it is safe for you. Your provider may recommend a stress test to find out how much exercise is safe for you. Ask your provider which exercises are best and whether the medicines you take will affect your response to exercise. Get your provider's approval before you lift weights, use a weight machine, jog, or swim. Ask if you should avoid chores such as raking, shoveling, mowing, or scrubbing.

Aerobic exercise is the most important part of an exercise program for people with heart disease. Aerobic exercise is any form of repetitive, rhythmic exercise that uses your large muscles, makes you breathe faster, and gets your heart beating faster. Examples include walking, dancing, swimming, or biking.

Before starting more vigorous aerobic exercise, warm up with walking and stretching for 10 to 15 minutes. After you finish your workout, cool down with a slow walk and stretching for at least 5 minutes.

Work up to 30 to 60 minutes of aerobic exercise 3 to 5 times a week. You can break up your exercise into 10 or 15 minute sessions. This approach is very helpful for people who are not used to exercising. Your provider may tell you that once your heart gets to a certain rate (number of heartbeats each minute), that you should stop or slow your exercising, so you will need to check your heart rate. To do this, check your pulse or use a digital heart rate monitor. Ask your provider if you should also check your blood pressure when you exercise.

Changing your workouts can help you stick with your exercise program. If you enjoy walking, this may simply mean changing your route or sometimes walking with a friend. Or you may want to try another type of exercise. Exercise machines like stationary bikes, cross-country ski machines,

stair-climbing machines, treadmills, and rowing machines provide other ways to get good aerobic exercise. You can use them in your home or join a gym. Many exercise machines allow you to read, watch TV, or listen to music while you are working out.

### **What should I watch out for?**

- Use common sense. If your exercise session leaves you exhausted, you've probably done too much. Do less next time.
- Don't exercise outdoors when it is too cold, hot, or humid. High humidity may make you tire more quickly. Extreme temperatures can interfere with circulation, make breathing difficult, and cause your heart to work harder. Try walking in an indoor shopping mall when the weather is very hot or very cold.
- Make sure you drink water before, during, and after exercise, even before you feel thirsty, especially on hot days.
- Do not exercise if you are feeling sick or have a fever. Wait a few days after all symptoms are gone before restarting your exercise program, unless your healthcare provider gives other directions.
- If you have not been able to exercise for a few days (for example, due to illness, vacation, or bad weather), start slowly and gradually increase your workout until you are back to where you started.
- [Stop exercising if you develop a rapid or irregular ]

**heartbeat, have chest pain, or have heart palpitations.**

Check your pulse after you have rested for 3 to 5 minutes. If it is still above 120 to 150 beats per minute, call your healthcare provider for further instructions. Also stop the exercise and call your healthcare provider right away if you have pressure or pain in the neck, arm, jaw, or shoulder.

- Talk with your provider about your exercise plan if you get weak, dizzy, or lightheaded, or have other symptoms when exercising.

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