

Focus on: Healthy heart

Current Article

Give your heart the best exercise

Looking for a heart-friendly workout? You may want to lace up your shoes, grab a jump rope or put on your cycling helmet.

Activities that bump up your heart rate and make you breathe harder than usual are especially good for your heart. They're called aerobic or endurance activities, and they should be a part of your exercise routine. But, before you significantly increase your level of physical activity, be sure to talk with your doctor. This is especially important if you've been inactive or have any health problems.



Pump up the beat

When you do aerobic exercise, it helps your heart, lungs and blood vessels become strong and fit. Aerobic exercise boosts your fitness level. And, it helps protect against heart disease and risk factors such as high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes.

There are many activities that get your body and heart working. For health and fitness benefits, plan to move at a moderate or vigorous pace. Need a few ideas?

Moderate activities include:

- **Taking a brisk walk**
- Riding a bike
- Playing doubles tennis
- Doing water aerobics

Vigorous moves include:

- Jogging
- Running
- Fast cycling
- Jumping rope
- Swimming laps
- **Hiking up hills**

Are you working hard enough?

Of course, it's possible to do activities such as walking at an intensity level that might not give you the most benefit. Also, activities such as cycling can be moderate or vigorous, depending on your pace. Your doctor will let you know the intensity you should aim for. Here are two ways to gauge your effort:

- Talk or sing. During moderate activities, such as brisk walking, you'll feel your heart rate and breathing pick up. But, you should be able to have a conversation. If you're breathing too hard to say much, you're probably doing vigorous exercise. If you find that you're out of breath, it's a good idea to slow down.

Belting out a song isn't something you'd normally do on a morning walk, but it can help you get a feel for how hard you're exercising. Give it a try. If you can sing, it's a sign to pick up the pace.

- Rate your exertion. Use an intensity scale — where 0 is sitting and 10 is max effort — to help estimate how hard you're exercising relative to your fitness. If your workout feels like a 5 or 6, it's probably moderate exercise. Vigorous activity usually is a 7 or 8.

Start small

In general, healthy adults should start slowly and gradually work their way up to a weekly goal of at least 2.5 hours of moderate activities. If — once you get up to speed — you decide to do vigorous activities, another option is to exercise at this pace for a total of 75 minutes a week.

Regular aerobic exercise has a world of benefits beyond the good it does your heart. It can help you feel and look your best and maintain strong bones, for instance. Strengthening exercises, such as working with resistance bands or doing push-ups, also are recommended at least two days a week.

Finding time for your heart and health may be easier than you think. Even 10-minute sessions of exercise throughout the week can help you reach your weekly goal and boost your heart and overall health. Shorter bursts of activity won't do as much good.

No matter which activities you choose, keep in mind that they work best when you do them on a regular basis. So, choose moves you enjoy and can make part of your routine.