

Journey to Wellness — A free self-guided healthy living program

Exercise for your heart



Engaging in regular physical activity is **crucial for maintaining heart health**. It is recommended that healthy adults try to get at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity, or an equal combination of moderate and vigorous activity each week.

What does aerobic exercise do for your heart health?

You repeatedly move large muscles in your arms, legs and hips during aerobic activity. You'll notice your body's responses quickly:

- You'll breathe faster and more deeply, which maximizes the amount of oxygen in your blood.
- Your heart will beat faster, which increases blood flow to your muscles and back to your lungs.
- Your small blood vessels (capillaries) will widen to deliver more oxygen to your muscles and carry waste products away from them, such as carbon dioxide and lactic acid.
- Your body will release endorphins, natural painkillers promoting an increased sense of well-being.

Aerobic activity helps you feel better and enjoy life to the fullest.

- Helps manage your weight.
- Increases your stamina.
- Activates your immune system.
- Reduces risk of and helps manage chronic conditions.
- Strengthens your heart.
- Helps clear your arteries and lower your low-density lipoprotein (LDL), the "bad" cholesterol.
- Boosts your mood.
- Keeps you active and independent as you age.

Try these tips to get started and stay motivated:

- Start slowly and build up gradually.
- Schedule exercise as you would schedule an important meeting or appointment.
- Make it social; invite family or friends to join you in an activity or exercise program.
- Build activity into your daily routine.
- Break it up. Aerobic exercise can be done in short blocks, such as several walk breaks spread throughout the day.
- Keep it fun. The best exercises are the ones you enjoy and will stick with.
- Try different activities. Alternate activities to help avoid overusing one specific muscle or joint.
- Include activities that increase strength and flexibility and improve posture and balance in addition to aerobic exercise.
- Reduce time spent sitting. Studies show that the more hours you sit each day, the higher your risk of dying of any cause. This is true even if you achieve the recommended amount of daily physical activity.

Remember to start slowly, especially if you're new to exercise or have health concerns. Consult a healthcare professional before beginning a new exercise program, especially if you have any existing health conditions. Listen to your body, stay hydrated and make exercise a regular part of your routine for long-term heart health.

Information adapted from "An appointment to exercise? You bet!", "Fitness aerobic exercise" and "The 5 elements of fitness."

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