

Heart Health Exercise Matters

Your body is designed for motion. Staying active supports many of its functions. The advice from the American Heart Association is to sit less and purposefully move more for heart health. Physical activity is anything that burns calories and moves your body.

How much exercise do you need? And what kinds of exercise should you do? How does exercise help keep your heart healthy?

The American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise weekly. Aim for 30 minutes of aerobic (or cardio) exercise at least five days a week. Aerobic exercise gets your heart rate up for more than a few minutes. When done at moderate intensity, your heart will beat faster, and you'll breathe harder than normal, yet you'll still be able to talk.

An ideal exercise program for heart health also incorporates about an hour of strength-training exercises per week. Two resistance training sessions for 30 minutes each are the typical recommendation.

Strength-training exercises can help your body gain more lean muscle mass. Muscles help keep your body and heart healthy by improving your metabolic rate.

Getting your body moving has many positive heart-healthy benefits that directly affect how your heart works. Among them:

- Lower blood pressure
- Balance or lower cholesterol levels
- Reduced Type 2 diabetes risk
- Maintain healthy body weight
- Decrease inflammation
- Regulate blood sugar
- Improve cardiorespiratory fitness
- Reduced risk of heart disease

Aerobic or cardio-style exercise improves the circulation within your heart, as well as the circulation throughout your entire cardiovascular system. The ability to circulate blood effectively and efficiently typically leads to reductions in cardiovascular risk.

When starting a new exercise program, start small and build up gradually; this allows your body to adapt to the new activity without risking injury and helps ensure long-term consistency in your workout routine. Consistent exercise over time is the key to success.

For good exercise performance, warming up and cooling down are needed. Warming up before any sport or workout is critical for preparing your body and preventing injury. A warm-up allows a gradual increase in heart rate and breathing at the start of the activity.

The cool-down is just as critical. It keeps the blood flowing throughout the body. Suddenly stopping can cause light-headedness because your heart rate and blood pressure drop rapidly. Stretching when you're cooling down is good because your joints, muscles and limbs are still warm.

Aerobic exercise is repetitive movement that increases your heart rate, blood flow, and breathing rate. Here are a few examples of exercise that benefits your heart health:

- Brisk walking
- Swimming
- Playing sports – basketball, soccer, etc.
- Dancing

Strength training can help reduce fat and create leaner muscle mass. Start by trying:

- Yoga
- Free weights
- Body weight exercises
- Weight machines

The key to a successful exercise routine is staying interested and motivated. Here are a few ways to keep exercise a lifelong habit:

1. Set aside a specific amount of time each day for exercise and work it into your schedule.
2. Start with smaller, achievable goals. As you meet them, move on to more challenging goals.
3. Hold yourself accountable. Work out with a friend or join a gym and work out in a group.
4. Keep a record of your fitness progress and workouts.
5. When you complete a workout or reach a fitness goal, give yourself immediate rewards.

Anything you can do to move more than your baseline is important progress toward improving your heart health.