

Aerobic Exercise Guidelines

What can exercise do for me?

Heart and lung fitness is the most important health reason for exercise. But regular exercise can also help you to:

- Lose weight or avoid gaining weight
- Control blood cholesterol, blood pressure, or diabetes
- Build healthy bones, muscles, and joints
- Improve your mental outlook and physical endurance
- Reduce stress

What kind of exercise should I do?

Isn't it enough that you walk a lot on the job, or golf a few times each week, or lift weights on the weekends? Not quite. Different activities help the body in different ways. Some can help you be more flexible, some will promote muscle strength, and some will increase fitness levels.

Golfing and weights can be good for your circulation and muscle tone, but to improve heart and lung fitness you need **aerobic exercise**. This is any activity that uses large muscle groups (in the legs or arms) and is done at a steady pace for 20 minutes or longer.

Examples of aerobic activities are:

- Brisk walking
- Hiking
- Cycling
- Swimming
- Jogging
- Rowing
- Cross-country skiing
- Dancing

If you have been inactive, you may need to begin with five to ten minutes of activity each day, then gradually increase your time and pace.

How much exercise should I do?

To help your heart, lungs, and circulation, it's best to gradually work up to at least **30 minutes of aerobic exercise three to four days each week, working at a moderate to vigorous pace**. If you are not able to exercise vigorously, you can gain many benefits by simply exercising at a slower pace on a daily basis. When weight loss is a goal, try to work up to 60 minutes of activity four to five days a week.

How will I know if I'm doing enough or if I'm overdoing it?

You can check yourself in one of three ways:

- 1) **Use the rating scale:** Make sure you exercise at a level that feels "moderate" to "somewhat hard" (3 to 4 on the rating scale below). Avoid exercising too lightly or too hard.

Rating Scale	
0	Standing at rest
0.5	Very, very easy
1	Very easy
2	Easy
3	Moderate
4	Somewhat hard
5	Hard
6	
7	Very hard
8	
9	Very, very hard
10	Maximal

- 2) **Use the talk test:** If you are exercising with a friend and you become breathless and unable to comfortably carry on a conversation, you need to slow down.

- 3) **Monitor your heart rate:** Here's how to find your pulse and determine your heart rate:
- Place your index and middle finger of one hand at one of the following locations:
 - a. Carotid artery on right or left side of neck (next to the "Adam's Apple")
 - b. Radial artery on the thumb side of the wrist when the palm is facing up
 - Count the number of beats you feel in a 15-second interval. Multiply by four for your heart rate.

How can I stay motivated to stay with the program?

Be sure you enjoy the activities you choose. For example, don't ask yourself to use a bike that's uncomfortable.

Try to vary your activities. Two walking sessions combined with two swimming or aerobic dance sessions each week may keep you from becoming bored with exercise.

Keep a log of your progress. Set realistic goals and reward yourself, even in a small way, when you achieve them.

Guidelines for safe exercise

Warm-up and cool-down: Always warm up and cool down with exercise. A warm-up means starting out at a slower pace for three to five minutes to gradually increase the heart rate and body temperature. This prepares the heart and muscles for activity.

A cool-down is a gradual decrease in exercise intensity for the last three to five minutes of your workout. Both warm-up and cool-down are good times to do some gentle stretching to promote flexibility. This prevents muscle soreness and injury.

Weather precautions: On warm, humid days, reduce your pace and distance as needed and exercise during the cooler times of day. Drink plenty of fluids before, during, or after exercise. Avoid overdressing; body heat should be allowed to escape naturally. Exercise indoors during ozone alerts.

In cold weather, wear layers of clothing you can take on or off according to how you feel. If cold air causes you discomfort, you may want to cover your mouth and nose, or exercise indoors.

Safety tips: If you have not been active, avoid trying too much, too fast, too soon. If you stop exercise for two weeks or longer, start up again slowly. Reduce your time and pace, then increase one step at a time until you're back to your normal level.

Some medications will affect your body's response to exercise. Check with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you have questions or concerns.

Stop exercise if you feel any of these symptoms and report them to your doctor:

- Faintness/feeling lightheaded
- Dizziness
- Excessive shortness of breath
- Chest pain or pressure