

# Heart Disease: Safe Exercise

## 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 your heart muscle pump more blood with less work and use oxygen better
- Lower your blood pressure and resting heart rate
- Lower your blood sugar
- Lower your total blood cholesterol
- Help you sleep
- Improve your energy level and confidence
- Help relieve stress

## 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. Ask your provider:

- Which exercises are best?
- How much exercise should I do?
- Will the medicines I take affect the way I exercise?
- What activities should I avoid?
- Should I wear a heart rate monitor when I exercise?

Your provider may recommend a stress test to find out how much exercise is safe for you.

### **Aerobic exercise**

- Aerobic exercise is the most important part of an exercise program if you have heart disease. Aerobic exercise increases your breathing and heart rate. This is important because it helps keep your heart and lungs healthy. Examples include walking, swimming, riding a bike, and dancing. Most team sports are aerobic. Being part of a team sport will give you a chance to exercise several times a week. Tennis, hockey, rowing, soccer, basketball, volleyball, and cross-country running are all good examples of aerobic sports. But, you need to do them briskly so that your heart and breathing rate go up. Aim for a moderate level of effort that lets you talk while moving, but without getting out of breath.
- Your provider may tell you that once your heart gets to a certain rate (number of heartbeats each minute), you should stop or slow your exercising. If 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.

## Strengthening

- Don't do a lot of exercise that involves straining your muscles, such as weight lifting, stair stepping, or doing sit-ups or push-up. Talk with your provider about ways to build strength without straining.

## Flexibility

- Flexibility exercises can help you move about more easily. Being flexible makes it easier to do many activities and also decreases your risk for getting hurt. Flexibility exercises help you use the full range of motion of your joints. Examples include stretching, yoga, and tai chi. Always do stretching exercises after a warm up activity.

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. You can use exercise machines like stationary bikes, treadmills, and elliptical trainers in your home or join a gym. Many exercise machines let you read, watch TV, or listen to music while you are working out.

## What should I watch out for?

- Get your provider's OK before you lift weights, use a weight machine, jog, or swim.
- Use common sense. Rest between sets to keep from getting too tired. 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. Cold temperatures cause your blood vessels to get smaller so that not as much blood flows. Cold weather can make it harder to breathe and cause your heart to work harder. Hot weather can also increase the workload on your heart. During hot weather, exercise in the early morning or evening. 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. Check with your healthcare provider about how much water you should drink.
- 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 immediately if you develop a fast or irregular heartbeat; have chest pressure or pain; or have pain in the neck, arm, jaw, or shoulder. If you keep having the symptoms for more than 5 minutes after stopping exercise, call 911.**
- 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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