

Exercise: How to Start



Staying active is one of the keys to good health. Even if you are an older adult or have not exercised regularly for years, getting more active is one of the best things you can do for yourself.

Regular exercise can help you to:

- Keep your heart and lungs healthy.
- Lose weight or stay at a healthy weight.
- Stay strong, limber, and able as you get older.

Make a plan

Once you decide to exercise, you will want to create a fitness routine. Although increasing your activity level any amount will help, try to do at least 2½ hours of moderate exercise a week. One way to do this is to be active 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week. Or try to do at least 1¼ hours of vigorous activity a week. One way to do this is to be active 25 minutes a day, at least 3 days a week. It's fine to be active

in blocks of 10 minutes or more throughout your day and week.

Most people think of classes and activities such as jogging or tennis as the way to fitness, but there are many ways you can be more active. Anything that makes you breathe hard and gets your heart pumping is exercise. Climbing stairs instead of taking an elevator, mowing your lawn, or even cleaning can all be exercise. You may also want to walk, take exercise classes, or join a health club. Whatever activities you choose, the key is to make exercise a habit that becomes a regular part of your life.

Tips for starting an exercise program

- Talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program. Make sure it is safe for you.
- Always start an exercise program slowly. Increase your activity day by day. Remember that it takes time to develop a full exercise program. Start at a pace that is comfortable for you.
- If you have problems exercising regularly on your own, ask someone to exercise with you, or join an exercise group or health club.
- Do not overtire yourself. Start with simple activities, such as walking, bicycling, slow swimming, or chores that get you breathing harder.
- Warm up your muscles for a few minutes before you start to exercise, and cool down your muscles for a few minutes when you finish. You can walk, slowly move your arms and legs, or do simple muscle stretches.
- Drink plenty of water before, during, and after you are active. This is very important when it's hot out and when you do intense exercise.

- Avoid strenuous exercise 3 to 4 hours before bedtime so that you will not have trouble falling asleep. Walking slowly or other relaxing activities, such as yoga or stretching, may help with sleep.
- If you have diabetes, exercise makes insulin work better and can lower your blood sugar. But it is important to make sure your blood sugar does not get too high or too low during exercise. Talk to your doctor about how to make sure your blood sugar stays in a safe range when you work out.
- If you have pain or severe breathing problems while you exercise, stop exercising. Call your doctor right away.

Monitoring your exercise

There are a few ways to keep track of how hard you are exercising and to measure results over time.

- **Heart rate.** You either can take your pulse with a stopwatch or use an electronic heart rate monitor. Checking your pulse can tell you if you are working out too hard or not hard enough. Over time, it can also tell you if your fitness level is improving. If you are taking any heart medicines, ask your doctor what your pulse rate should be. Some heart medicines may affect your heart rate.
- **Breathing rate.** Measuring the number of times you breathe in and out in 1 minute can tell you how much you are taxing your body. As you get more fit, you will need fewer breaths in each minute for the same level of effort. Use the **"talk-sing" test** to see if you are exercising at a pace that is right for you. If you can talk while you are exercising, you are doing fine. If you can sing during exercise, you can exercise a little faster or

harder. If you are not able to talk, you are probably exercising too hard. Slow down a bit.

- **Weight and fat loss.** As you get more fit, you will be able to be more active and your body will burn more calories. At first, you will notice you look more trim, and then you may begin to lose weight. Although measuring your weight may show improvement in your fitness over time, a simple test to measure how much body fat you have is the best way to judge your progress.

Talk to your doctor

If you have any health problems, or if you have not exercised in many years, talk to your doctor about:

- What activities are safe for you.
- How hard and how often you should exercise.
- What your goals should be. These may change as you get into better shape.

Questions to ask your doctor

Use the space below to list your questions or concerns. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

Questions about starting an exercise program: