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# What You Need To Know About Exercise

Any physical activity which raises your heart rate, even for short periods of time, represents worthwhile exercise. If you can do this for 20 to 30 minutes three times a week, then it will benefit your health.

Exercise will:

- \* stimulate your metabolism - enabling you to maintain or lose weight more easily
- \* burn off unused adrenaline - relieving tension and giving your body a chance to let off steam
- \* make your muscles stronger - particularly the heart muscle, which is the most important muscle in the human body, which will
- \* reduce your risk of developing heart disease.

If you have had a heart attack a graded series of exercises can be prescribed to help you become fit again. Regular exercise reduces the level of fats in the blood so that your arteries are less likely to clog up; and it tightens the ligaments in the chest and pelvis.

If you have heart or lung disease then, over a period of time, regular exercise will improve your ability to live as full a life as possible.

In childhood and young adult life, regular exercise helps build bones. In later life it helps to protect these bones and to prevent the development of osteoporosis.

Children with asthma should be encouraged to exercise regularly since this will improve their breathing.

Even people with arthritis can benefit from sensible levels of exercise.



If you are overweight or obese then regular exercise is an essential part of every weight-loss programme. However, exercise must be taken in conjunction with diet and changed behaviour as it is extremely hard to lose weight by exercise alone. Nevertheless, if you are attempting to lose weight, regular exercise will stimulate your metabolism and help to burn off unnecessary fat.

Perhaps most importantly, regular exercise makes you feel better about yourself:

- \* Your body shape will grow tauter as the muscles tighten
- \* You will grow in confidence
- \* You will look better
- \* You will be more mobile

\* You will feel more comfortable in your clothes

It is not necessary to visit a gym or to go jogging to take part in worthwhile exercise. Most people can get adequate exercise simply by increasing their normal activities, for example:

- climbing the stairs rather than going by lift
- walking or cycling to work or to school
- walking daily to the local shops rather than going by car to a supermarket once a week
- taking up walking as a weekly exercise
- avoiding using the car or bus for short journeys
- mowing the lawn regularly by hand

This type of exercise has the advantage that it can easily be fitted into a normal daily routine and it can be gradually increased according to a person's level of fitness.

Modern 21st century life has for many people, removed the necessity for many ordinary everyday exercises. The availability of car travel; loss of school sports fields; increased time spent at work and less at play; the costs of taking part in sports – all have meant that the population now takes less exercise than it did 20 years ago. In the United States, the average American walks less than 150 yards per day.

It is this loss of everyday exercise that is blamed by many for increased numbers of heart attacks and strokes, for increased levels of obesity and overweight in the population; and for the growing problem of osteoporosis (a cause of bone fractures) in later life.

Many people will wish to take more vigorous exercise and to dedicate specific time to getting fit. Different activities require different levels of stamina. If you are unfit or if you are more than 55 years of age, then it is important to begin with an activity which requires a lower level of stamina.

Physical Activity: health benefit rating

One star Two star Three star Four star

Cricket Badminton Canoeing Cycling (hard)

Dancing Gymnastics Climbing stairs Jogging

Golf Judo Dancing (disco) Rowing

Weightlifting Mowing lawn (by hand) Digging garden Swimming (hard)

Yoga Tennis Football Water skiing

Sailing Walking (briskly) Hill walking Ditch digging

Bowling Horse back riding Roller skating Hand ball

Housework General gardening Squash Volley ball

Activities that have the most beneficial effect upon health are activities in which the increase in heart rate is sustained over a prolonged period - known as aerobic exercises. Activities that involve shorter bursts of energy for

short periods of time are less beneficial - known as anaerobic exercises. If you are unsure what level of activity you should begin with, please discuss it with your practice nurse or doctor. Also your local gymnasium is likely to provide a pre-fitness assessment and advice.

Different types of exercise use different amounts of energy. The calorie and food equivalent of different types of exercise is shown in this table.

Activity Energy expended / Hr in kilocalories Food equivalent expended / Hour

Driving a car 80 Slice of bread

Standing relaxed 100 Glass of white wine

Standing doing light work 180 Bag of crisps

Walking 5km/hour 260 1.5 pints of beer

Walking 7 km/hour 420 2.5 oz peanuts

Running 9 km/hour 600 2 Mars bars

Swimming (crawl 50 metres/min) 840 6 chocolate digestive biscuits

Cross country Skiing (competitive) 1440 Roast dinner with sponge pudding

Once you have found a form of exercise you enjoy, then try to do it: often enough – 2 or 3 times a week for 20-30 minutes at a time hard enough – to make you fairly breathless but not gasping for breath long enough – it should become part of your life, for good!

**Aerobic and anaerobic exercise** Aerobic exercise is better for your health than anaerobic exercise. In aerobic exercise, the energy burning requirements of your body are balanced by the amount of oxygen you are breathing in. Your heart rate will be steady, your metabolism balanced and you will be able to sustain the activity for a long period of time.

If you exercise too fast, then your muscles will start to anaerobically. You will then be burning energy faster than your blood can carry oxygen to the muscles. Because of this toxic waste products (lactic acid) will form. Your muscles will begin to tire. Your heart rate will increase and within a short time you will have to stop exercising. This sort of exercise is not as good for your health as aerobic exercise.

The easiest way to tell when your muscles are starting to work anaerobically is by measuring your heart rate. If stay aerobic, you should aim to keep your heart working within the ideal target heart rate zone.

You can calculate your ideal heart rate zone using a special formula known as the Karvonen formula (shown below).

Your maximum heart rate =  $220 - (\text{Your age})$

Your ideal target heart rate training zone is a percentage of this maximum permitted heart rate – usually between 70 and 80 percent. So a 40 year old person who is fit and who exercises regularly could work at between 70 and 80 percent of this permitted maximum heart rate.

ie: Maximum Heart rate =  $220 - 40 = 180$

Training HR Zone =  $(180 \text{ times } 70\% = 126)$  to  $(180 \text{ times } 80\% = 144)$

This means that this person should exercise so as to keep the heart rate between 126 and 144 if they wish to stay within the aerobic zone.

If the person is unfit then 20 should be subtracted from the 220 in the Maximum Heart rate formula.

NOTE: The average adult resting heart rate is 60 to 90 beats per minute. The lower the heart rate, the less work the heart has to perform for any given level of exercise. Not everyone is fit when they start exercising and this formula needs to be modified to suit individual circumstances. Your local gym, nurse or doctor will be able to provide more specific advice on how to begin your exercise programme.

Heart rate monitors with digital readouts are available at most gymnasia. Body monitors can be worn whilst taking part in sports like jogging.

### **Tell Your Doctor**

1. If you are thinking of starting an exercise programme
2. If you have had any serious illnesses which might affect you taking exercise
3. If you have had any untoward events while taking exercise (for example breathlessness, chest pains and dizzy spells)

### **Ask Your Doctor**

1. What sort of exercise would be good for you
2. If there are any special precautions you should take
3. Where there is a local fitness centre
4. If there is a special rehabilitation centre in your area, if you have had a specific illness

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