



Patient Information

Fitness Basics

What does exercise do for my body?

Research has shown that any amount of exercise, at any age, is beneficial. Exercise can help you achieve a more favorable outcome with these conditions:

- **Heart disease.** Regular physical activity reduces the risk of stroke, heart disease, and high blood pressure.
- **Stroke.** A study published in the journal *Stroke* found that moderately active participants had a 20% lower risk of stroke compared with less active participants.
- **Type 2 diabetes.** Because of the high incidence of diabetes, an increase of 62% since 1990, weight loss can be beneficial for patients with type 2 diabetes. Losing weight can help increase insulin sensitivity, improve blood sugar and cholesterol, and reduce blood pressure.
- **Obesity.** Obesity is a risk factor for many diseases. Lowering your body mass index (BMI) reduces your risk of dying early.
- **Back pain.** A fitness program that includes muscle strengthening and flexibility can help manage or prevent back pain.
- **Osteoporosis (oss-tee-oh-puhr-oh-sis).** Women can help prevent osteoporosis or the bone loss frequently seen in postmenopausal women by doing weight-bearing exercises (eg, walking, jogging, stair climbing, dancing, or lifting weights).
- **Mental health.** In addition to helping you cope with stress and ward off

depression and anxiety, exercising releases chemicals called endorphins, which can improve mood.

If I'm over 40, will exercise really help me?

Absolutely, even if you have a chronic health problem, such as heart disease or arthritis. The key is to know your limits and to keep your doctor informed. Consulting your doctor is always a good idea—especially if you haven't exercised much in the past or have a medical condition, such as asthma, high blood pressure, or diabetes. You can ask for an exercise prescription or plan. As with any prescription, tell your doctor right away if you develop troubling symptoms after you start. Muscle-strengthening exercises can be particularly beneficial for older adults.

If you are considering joining a gym, keep these items in mind:

- **Medical clearance.** Schedule a checkup before joining a gym or beginning an exercise program to discuss any concerns or physical limitations.
- **Medical history.** Make sure your trainer or club manager knows your medical and family history when planning your workout program. The plan should include a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire or PAR-Q test to see whether increasing your physical activity is right for you. Workouts should be planned around your physical ability.
- **Current conditions.** Your fitness instructor needs to be aware of any health conditions, risk factors, and medications you're taking. These con-



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ditions may cause symptoms such as fatigue, muscle aches, or other issues that may be falsely attributed to workout issues.

- **Goals.** Your fitness instructor should be made aware of your fitness goals (weight loss, more energy, pain relief, joint strength, etc.), and you should be satisfied that the instructor has the ability to help you meet them.
- **Be realistic.** You're not in competition with younger members or even with the memory of your former self. Aim to meet new, age-adjusted goals, based on your current capabilities.
- **Let your body be your guide.** Don't let your trainer dictate what pace is appropriate for you. Listen to your body if it tells you to slow down.

Tell your doctor right away if you develop any troubling symptoms after starting an exercise program. If joining a gym isn't your thing, work out at home doing squats, lunges, push-ups, and sit-ups. You may want to invest in a treadmill, free weights, an exercise ball, and exercise videos and DVDs. You can also "sneak" in exercise by taking the stairs instead of the elevator or walk to destinations within a mile.

How much exercise do I need, and what types of exercises should I be doing?

The American Heart Association recommends at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, like walking, most days of the week. If you can't do 30 minutes, you'll still see benefits from just 5 to 10 minutes of activity. You can measure the intensity of your exercise by measuring your heart rate during physical activity.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that a person's heart rate should be 50% to 70% of his or her maximum heart rate for moderate-intensity physical activity. Don't forget to warm up before beginning any fitness routine. A good fitness regimen combines these elements:

- **Cardiovascular (kar-dee-oh-vass-kyoo-luhr) activity.** You can get started with an aerobic activity, such as walking or running, for 20 to 30 minutes, 4 to 5 times a week. You should be able to carry on a basic level of conversation without being too winded. On the other hand, if you're able to easily sing a song, you're not working hard enough.
- **Strength training.** Use a weight that you can comfortably lift 8 to 12 times in a set. Gradually increase the weight, number of repetitions, or number of sets. For maximum benefits, commit to strength training at least twice a week, and don't work the same body parts 2 days in a row.
- **Flexibility training.** Perform slow, sustained static stretches lasting 10 to 30 seconds 3 to 7 days a week.

For more information, log on to the website for Exercise Medicine, <http://exercisemedicine.org/>.

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