

# EXERCISE

## A healthy habit to start and keep

### How much exercise do I need?

This depends on your age, your general health and fitness, and how active you've been in the past. Exercise has so many benefits, any amount is better than none.

#### Benefits of regular exercise

- Reduces your risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, *osteoporosis* (a bone-thinning disease), diabetes and obesity
- Keeps joints, tendons and ligaments flexible so it's easier to move around
- Reduces some of the effects of aging
- Contributes to your mental well-being and helps treat depression
- Helps relieve stress and anxiety
- Increases your energy and endurance
- Helps you sleep better
- Reduces the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS)
- Helps you maintain a normal weight by increasing your *metabolism* (the rate at which you burn calories)

### How do I get started?

**Talk with your doctor.** Start by talking with your doctor about the right approach for you. This is especially important if you haven't been active, if you have any health problems, if you're overweight, if you take any medicine, if you're pregnant or elderly, or if you're at risk for injury.

**Set a goal.** Do you want to look better in a swimsuit? Lose that spare tire around your middle? Or build up your stamina? Pick a goal and keep it in mind.

**Start slowly.** If you've been inactive for years, you can't run a marathon after two weeks of training. Begin with a 10-minute period of light exercise or a brisk walk every day and gradually increase how hard you exercise and for how long.

Everyday activities can be used to increase your level of activity. If you try to do too much too soon, you may get so sore that you decide exercising isn't such a good idea after all.

Talk to your doctor about how much exercise is right for you. A good goal for many people is to exercise three or more times a week for 20 minutes or more.

**Keep it simple.** Walking and running, for example, require only a good pair of shoes and no

#### Fit exercise into your day

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Go for a walk during your coffee break or lunch.
- Walk all or part of the way to work.
- Do housework at a fast pace.
- Rake leaves or do other yard work.

other special equipment. Find a space to exercise in your neighborhood, so you don't have to spend time traveling. Or put a stationary bicycle in front of the TV set.

**Pick up the right activity.** Choose something you like to do. Make sure it suits you physically, too. For instance, swimming (or other exercise in water) is easier on arthritic joints than running or jogging.

**Get a partner.** Exercising with someone else can make it more fun. Join a walking club, a sports team or an aerobics class.

**Vary your routine.** You don't have to do the same exercise every time. You may be less likely to get bored or injured if you change your routine. Walk one day. Bicycle the next. Consider activities like dancing and racquet sports, and even chores like mowing the lawn.

**Choose a comfortable time of day.** Don't work out too soon after eating or when it's too hot or cold outside. Wait until later in the day if you're too stiff in the morning.

**In bad weather, exercise inside.** Go mall walking. Invest in some home equipment. Join a health club.

**Don't get discouraged.** It can take weeks or months before you notice some of the changes from exercise. And you may not get the "perfect" body you have in mind. You may need to adjust your expectations.

**Forget "no pain, no gain".** While a little soreness is normal after you first start exercising, pain isn't. Stop if you hurt. There's a reason for the pain. Don't overexert.

**Make exercise fun.** Read, listen to music or watch TV while riding a stationary bicycle, for example. Find fun things to do, like taking a walk through the zoo. Go dancing. Take up gardening. Learn how to play tennis.

#### Making exercise a habit

- Stick to a regular time every day.
- Sign a contract committing yourself to exercise.
- Put "exercise appointments" on your calendar.
- Keep a daily log or diary of your activities.
- Check your progress. Can you walk a certain distance faster now than when you began? Or is your heart rate slower now?
- Ask your doctor to write a prescription for your exercise program, such as what type of exercise to do, how often to exercise and for how long.
- Think about joining a health club. The cost gives some people an incentive to exercise regularly.

### Will I need a special diet?

Most people who exercise don't need any kind of special diet. Make sure you drink plenty of fluids when you're exercising, especially in hot and humid weather. You don't need salt tablets.

### How can I prevent injuries?

Start every workout with a warm-up. That will make your muscles and joints more flexible. Spend five to 10 minutes doing some light calisthenics and stretching exercises, and perhaps brisk walking. Do the same thing when you're done working out - until your heart rate returns to normal.

Pay attention to your body. Stop exercising if you

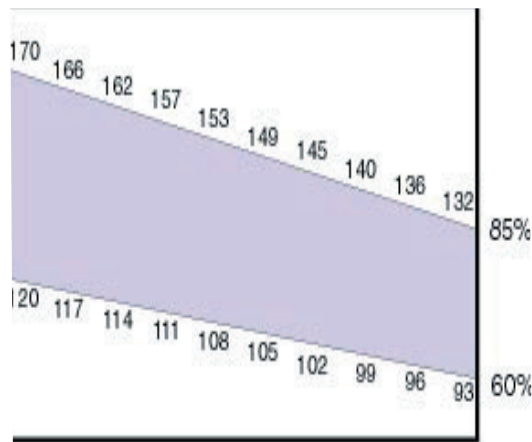
feel very out of breath, dizzy, faint or nauseous, or have chest pain.

### What is aerobic exercise?

*Aerobic exercise* is the type that moves large muscle groups and causes you to breathe more deeply and your heart to work harder to pump blood. It's also called *cardiovascular exercise*. It improves the health of your heart and lungs. Examples include walking, jogging, running, aerobic dance, bicycling, rowing, swimming and cross-country skiing.

You can measure your aerobic workout by checking your *target heart rate*. Subtract your age from 220 and multiply the result by 60% and by 85%. The two numbers that result are the range you want your heart rate to fall within when you're exercising. You can check your heart rate by counting your pulse beats for 15 seconds and multiplying the beats by four.

The chart below shows the result of this calculation for people of different ages. When you're just starting out, shoot for the lower number until you adjust to exercising.



### What is weight-bearing exercise?

*Weight-bearing exercise* is important for building strong bones. Having strong bones helps prevent osteoporosis and bone fractures later in life. Examples of weight-bearing exercises include walking, jogging, hiking, climbing stairs, dancing and weight training. Although many aerobic activities are also weight-bearing, not all of them are. Exceptions include swimming, cycling and rowing.

### What about weight training?

*Weight training*, or *strength training*, builds strength and muscles and may increase flexibility. You don't have to use fancy machines at health clubs. Some calisthenics, like push-ups, are weight-training exercises. You can use weights at home as well as at the gym. If you have high blood pressure, talk to your family doctor before beginning weight training.

### What is the best exercise?

The best exercise is the one that you will do. Walking is considered one of the best choices because it's easy, safe and cheap. Brisk walking can burn as many calories as running. Walking is also a weight-bearing exercise, so it helps build strong bones and prevent osteoporosis. It's less likely than running or jogging to cause injuries. And it doesn't require any training or special equipment, except for good shoes.

If you want a more intense workout while walking, swing your arms back and forth when you walk and lengthen your stride. This is called *pace walking* or *power walking*. Make exercise a regular part of your day. Find something you enjoy doing. Have fun!



This brochure provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this brochure applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

This health education material has been favorably reviewed by the Patient Education Review Committee of the College of Family Physicians of Canada.



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The College of Family Physicians of Canada, one of the nation's largest medical specialty groups, is committed to promoting and maintaining high standards for family doctors – the doctors who give ongoing, comprehensive care to people of all ages.

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