



# Exercise and the Heart

Boot Camp & Military Fitness Institute

Since 2001, death rates from heart disease and stroke in the UK have halved for both males and females. However, in 2015, heart disease was the most common cause of death for males. It was the cause of 1.8 times as many deaths as the second leading cause of death: dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

You can reduce your risk of heart disease by doing some exercise every day. Regular exercise helps lower your blood pressure, blood cholesterol and body weight. You can reduce your risk of heart disease even more by eating a healthy diet as well as doing regular exercise.

## **Benefits of exercise:**

Some of the health benefits of regular exercise are:

- Lower blood pressure.
- Lower blood cholesterol.
- Lower risk of or better control of heart disease.
- Lower risk of or better control of diabetes.
- Lower risk of some cancers.
- Better weight control.
- Stronger and healthier bones, muscles and joints which reduces the risk of falls and injuries.
- Better posture.
- Increased feelings of well-being and relief of stress, anxiety and depression.
- More energy.
- Better sleep.

Regular exercise is important for all people, no matter what their age, weight, health problems or abilities. Children and teenagers who do regular exercise are less likely to have high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and heart disease when they are adults. Regular exercise also helps older people to stay healthy, independent and active.





### How much exercise?

Health authorities recommend that adults exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.

Moderate-level exercise involves some effort. It increases your pulse (heart) rate and breathing rate, but you can still talk comfortably (e.g. brisk walking, medium-paced cycling or swimming, mowing the lawn, digging the garden). Physiotherapists and other trained health and fitness professionals can advise you on different types of exercise (e.g. aerobic, weight bearing, resistance).

For children and teenagers (5-18 years of age) health authorities recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

### Getting started

- It is never too late to start or increase exercise and every little bit helps. Plan your exercise. Choose activities you enjoy and will want to and be able to continue.
- Think of exercise as a chance to improve your health and well being and not as a waste of time.
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can (e.g. walk or cycle instead of driving; use stairs instead of lifts; park your car 10-15 minutes from work and walk the last part).

- Your daily exercise need not be all in one session. If you are busy, aim to be active for several 10-15 minute sessions throughout the day (e.g. 10 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes at lunchtime and 10 minutes after work).

### Fitness and weight loss

To stay healthy your heart, lungs, muscles and bones need at least 30 minutes of moderate-level exercise on all or most days of the week. To help manage body weight and stop weight gain, adults usually need at least 60 minutes of moderate-level physical exercise every day, combined with healthy eating.

Regular, vigorous exercise helps give you extra fitness, weight loss and protection against heart disease. Vigorous exercise increases your pulse rate and breathing so that you puff and pant. For the best results, you need to do vigorous exercise for at least 30 minutes on three or four days a week.

Note: If you have heart disease, check with your doctor before doing vigorous exercise.

### Self care

- Spend at least 30 minutes a day walking briskly. Go to different places to make it interesting.
- Relax and breathe deeply while you walk.



- Drink plenty of fluid before, during and after exercise. Avoid alcohol and caffeine drinks (e.g. tea, coffee, cola, energy drinks) as these can make your body lose extra fluid.
- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes made for walking or running.
- Warm up before starting your exercise and gently stretch afterwards. This will help avoid muscle cramps, stiffness, aches and pains.
- Do not exercise with injuries or if you feel pain or discomfort. Ask a doctor or physiotherapist for advice.
- Exercise at cooler times of the day.
- Make exercise fun (e.g. exercise with a friend; join a class or a club).
- Reward yourself (in a healthy way) when you have kept to your exercise plan.
- Have a healthy diet. Eat a variety of vegetables, fruit, wholegrain foods, nuts and seeds every day. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises not to).
- Do not smoke.
- Limit alcohol to no more than two standard drinks per day.
- If you have a medical condition, wear a bracelet or necklace (e.g. a MedicAlert bracelet) that states your condition.

### **Important**

Get advice from a doctor before starting an exercise program if you:

- Have, or think you have, heart disease.
- Have a close relative with heart disease.
- Are overweight.
- Are over 45 years old.
- Have had a stroke.
- Have high blood pressure.
- Have any medical conditions, past or present, which may affect your exercise.
- Smoke - think about quitting.
- Have not exercised for a while.
- Are pregnant.

If exercise gives you chest pain or tightness, makes your heart beat too fast, makes you breathless, dizzy or nauseous or gives you pain, stop straight away and get medical advice.

### **Warning signs of heart attack**

Warning signs of a heart attack vary from person to person and may include:

- Pain, pressure, heaviness or tightness in your chest, neck, jaw, arm(s), back or shoulders.
- A feeling of nausea, dizziness, shortness of breath or a cold sweat.

If you have the warning signs of heart attack for 10 minutes, if they are severe or get worse, phone 999 for an ambulance.