

# Aerobic Exercise

---

## KEY POINTS

- Aerobic exercise is any activity that increases your breathing and heart rate, such as bicycling, swimming, or walking briskly.
  - Aerobic exercise makes your lungs, heart, and muscles stronger. It improves blood flow and muscle tone. It also decreases your blood pressure, increases the levels of HDL (good cholesterol) in your blood, and burns calories, which can help you lose weight.
  - With your healthcare provider's approval, a healthy goal for most adults is at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise 5 times per week.
- 

## What is aerobic exercise?

Aerobic exercise is any activity that increases your breathing and heart rate. When you do aerobic exercise, your lungs work harder to bring in more oxygen. Your heart pumps harder to send blood with more oxygen to your muscles. Some examples of aerobic exercise are:

- Bicycling
- Climbing stairs
- Cross-country skiing
- Dancing
- Ice skating or roller skating
- Jogging
- Jumping rope
- Playing tennis
- Swimming
- Walking briskly

Other activities such as working in the garden, washing windows, and sweeping can also be aerobic. But, you need to do them briskly so that your heart and breathing rate go up.

## Why is aerobic exercise important?

Aerobic exercise helps your body use oxygen more effectively. It makes your lungs, heart, and muscles stronger. It improves blood flow and muscle tone. It also:

- Helps you stay active for a longer time without getting tired
- Decreases your blood pressure, which reduces your risk for having a stroke
- Decreases your heart rate, which makes your heart work less hard.
- Increases the levels of HDL (good cholesterol) in your blood
- Helps your lungs not work as hard

- Burns calories, which will help you lose weight
- Lifts your mood if you are depressed

You will also look and feel better.

## **Do I need to take a class?**

You do not need to take special classes, but classes can be fun. They can be a good way to get started if you've never done much exercise before, if you don't really like exercise, or if you prefer group activities.

Many classes combine exercises that help you stretch, burn fat, and build muscles. These exercises are often done to music, so that it feels like dancing. You will learn how to stretch your muscles before and after exercising, how to warm up before your workout, and how to cool down afterward.

Many health, fitness, recreational, and community centers offer different types of aerobics classes for all ages and fitness levels. In low-impact aerobics classes, there is little jarring on your body, which makes it an excellent choice for people with joint problems or low back pain. Cycling, rowing, elliptical trainer, and walking are all forms of low-impact aerobic exercises. High impact exercise, such as running, basketball, tennis, and high impact aerobics classes, put more stress on your joints.

Daily walking is a great way for many people to exercise. You don't need a special place, special equipment, or special clothes. You don't need an instructor or group leader. If you live in an area with extreme weather, or you don't feel safe walking outside, you can try walking at a local indoor shopping mall. Start slowly. Taking three 10-minute walks per day reduces your risk of heart disease. Even if you do less than 10 minutes at a time, it can still improve your health. Work up to at least 1 mile per day. Walk as far and as fast as is comfortable for you. The more fit you become, the more you will enjoy your exercise.

## **What about target heart rates?**

While you are doing aerobic exercise, you should keep your heart rate up. To make sure you are getting the most from your exercise, you may find it helpful to check your heart rate (pulse) during your workout. A target heart rate helps make sure you are exercising hard enough to help your heart, and that you are exercising safely. You can also use your target heart rate to check your progress over time.

To figure your maximum heart rate, subtract your age from 220. Your target heart rate should be between 50% and 85% of your maximum heart rate. For example, if you are 60, your maximum heart rate is  $220 - 60 = 160$ . Your target heart rate is between 80 (50% of 160) and 136 (85% of 160).

If you exercise moderately every day and feel good doing it, there's no need to be overly concerned with your target heart rate.

## How much and how often should I exercise?

For health and fitness, regular exercise is more important than intense exercise. Choose an exercise routine that you enjoy and will keep doing.

If you have diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol, ask your provider which exercises are best and if the medicines you take will affect your exercise.

With your healthcare provider's approval, a healthy goal for most adults is at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. For example, you could do 30 to 60 minutes of moderate exercise 5 days per week or 20 to 60 minutes of intense exercise 3 days per week. You don't need to do the whole 30 or 60 minutes all at once - you can do shorter periods of at least 10 minutes each time. Aim for a moderate level of effort that lets you talk while moving, but without getting out of breath. If you are unable to meet these guidelines, remember that some exercise is still better than no exercise at all.

Be sure to check with your healthcare provider before you start your exercise program.

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*

Developed by Change Healthcare.

Published by Change Healthcare.

Produced in Cork, Ireland.