

## Exercise: The Key to Good Health

There are different kinds of exercise that can help you get fit and stay healthy:

- **Aerobic exercise** gets your heart beating faster and gets you breathing hard. Activities such as walking or riding a bike not only strengthen your heart, lungs, and blood vessels but also help keep you healthy in many other ways.
- **Strength training** helps tone and strengthen your muscles and bones.
- **Stretching** helps you stay flexible.

If you are already in good health, a balanced fitness routine can help you stay that way. If you are not in good health, or if you have a long-term health problem, getting regular exercise may be even more important.

As you grow older, staying active can help both your physical and mental health. It can also keep you lively and independent. No matter who you are, there is a fitness routine that is right for you.

### How do you start an exercise routine?

1. Talk to your doctor about how much you should exercise and what activities are best for you. This is especially important if you have health problems or you have not exercised for a long time.
2. Decide what kind of aerobic activities you want to try.



3. Learn how to stretch and do strength exercises the right way so that you do not hurt yourself. Find books or brochures, or find a class.
4. Start gradually, with goals you know you can meet. Then set new ones. Just deciding to be more active is too general. Decide exactly what you are going to do, when you are going to do it, and for how long.

The key to a successful exercise routine is to pick activities that you like and that are safe for you. You are much more likely to stick with a program if you enjoy what you are doing. If you exercise regularly, you will be surprised at how quickly you get stronger and more fit. You may be surprised by how good

regular exercise makes you feel.

## Aerobic exercise

This is also called cardiovascular or "cardio" exercise. It is one of the most important things you can do to stay healthy. Aerobic exercise can improve health problems ranging from diabetes to high blood pressure. It even reduces stress and helps keep your mind sharp.

- Try to do at least 2½ hours of moderate exercise a week. One way to do this is to be active 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week. But even if you do less, you can still benefit. Start out with just a few minutes, a few days a week, and build up from there.
- You do not need to do your whole workout at once. For example, you can do three 10-minute sessions instead of one 30-minute workout.
- You can get aerobic exercise without any fancy equipment or a trip to the gym by being more active in your daily routine. Anything that gets your heart beating faster and gets you breathing hard will work. Brisk walking, vacuuming, housework, gardening, or yard work can all be aerobic.
- The **"talk-sing" test** is an easy way to see if you are exercising at a pace that is right for you.
  - You should be able to talk while you exercise. If you are too short of breath to carry on a conversation, you are working too hard. Slow down a bit.
  - If you can sing while exercising, you are not working hard enough. Pick up the pace a little.

## Strength training

Strength training does not mean you have to

lift heavy weights or grow bulging biceps.

Your goal may be to strengthen your knees or back, to increase your ability to get around, to lower your risk of falling, or to stay trim. Even doing a few simple exercises twice a week can make a big difference.

- You can do exercises such as push-ups or sit-ups, use weights, or use machines. You can even do strength exercises with a rubber tube.
- Be sure to do exercises that include all of the different large muscle groups: chest, arms, stomach, back, and legs.
- Do strength or resistance exercises at least 2 times each week.

## Stretching

Stretching not only keeps you flexible but also reduces muscle soreness and tension, improves your posture, and may help prevent injuries.

- You can do a stretching routine at home that will help keep you flexible.
- You can go to a health club to take a class that includes stretching.
- You can do yoga or tai chi. These are great ways to stay limber. They are also good for balance and reducing stress.
- Always warm up a bit before stretching. For example, take a short walk.
- Never bounce while stretching or push a stretch so far that it hurts.

## Resources

**American Heart Association:**

1-800-242-8721; [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)

**Centers for Disease Control and**

**Prevention:** 1-800-232-4636; [www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity](http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity)