



Get moving, for a lot of reasons

I know that getting enough exercise is recommended to reduce the risk of heart disease. Is that just because doing so helps you maintain a healthy weight, or is there a separate benefit?

Your instincts are on the mark. While both a healthy diet and regular physical activity can reduce a whole host of risk factors related to heart disease — such as maintaining a healthy weight, reducing blood pressure and cholesterol, and managing blood sugar levels — they both have heart-healthy benefits in their own right.

Inactive people are nearly twice as likely to develop coronary heart disease as people who are physically active, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

Physical activity helps the heart in a number of ways. Regularly engaging in moderate to vigorous activity strengthens the heart muscle, which helps improve your heart's ability to pump blood to your lungs and throughout your body. That allows more blood to flow to muscles, and increases oxygen levels in your blood.

The microscopically small blood vessels throughout your body, called capillaries, also widen. This allows them to deliver more oxygen to tissues.

Aerobic exercise benefits your heart and lungs the most. That's the type of exercise that moves the large muscle groups in your arms and legs.

Walking, jogging, running, swimming, biking, dancing, tennis, basketball, skateboarding, jumping rope and doing jumping jacks are all examples of aerobic exercise.

Even working in the yard and garden — digging, hoeing or raking — or doing housework counts as aerobic exercise if the activity is vigorous enough to increase your heart rate.

You know you're exercising hard enough to have an effect if the activity causes noticeable increases in your breathing and heart rate. You're doing moderate-intensity activity if you can still talk, but not sing, while doing the activity. If you find you can't say more than a few words without stopping for a breath, you've reached the level of "vigorous" activity.

If you're currently not very active, build up gradually to 2.5 hours of moderate-intensity activity per week — that's 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Just 10 minutes three times a day counts toward that goal.

If you already have heart problems or have other risk factors — if you're overweight, if you smoke, if you have diabetes or high blood pressure, for example — first check with your doctor about what type of exercise is right for you.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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