



IOWA HEART CENTER

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# Exercise & Heart Disease

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Physical inactivity increases the risk of having heart disease. It also increases the chances of developing other risk factors for heart disease such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and excess weight. Exercise has been proven to decrease the risk of heart disease and death from heart related causes. Other benefits include weight loss, lowering blood pressure, lowering cholesterol and blood sugar levels, improved muscle tone, improved sleep, increased energy, and lowering stress levels.

A little exercise is better than no exercise. The American Heart Association recommends a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most, preferably all, days of the week. An appropriate moderate activity is brisk walking, bicycling, housecleaning, raking leaves, or gardening. You can do as little as 10 minutes at a time three times a day to equal 30 minutes and still receive cardiac benefit.

## What is moderate activity?

Any of the following: walking briskly (3-4 miles per hour), housework, racquet sports, lawn mowing with power mower, golf (pulling cart or carrying clubs), home repair/house painting, jogging, swimming, cycling at moderate speed (10 mph or less), gardening, canoeing, or dancing.

Keys to success with exercise include **starting out slow**. If you are just starting an exercise routine, gradually build yourself up to 30 minutes a day. If you are inactive now, begin slowly with a 10-15 minute walk three times a week. As you become more fit, you can increase the session length or pace. **Make sure you are stretching and warming up** for 5 minutes before you start and doing the same to cool down at the end of your routine. Some stiffness is normal at first, but if you hurt a joint or pull a muscle, stop for several days to avoid a more serious injury. **Warning signs that you should stop** your exercise and contact your healthcare provider include: sudden dizziness, cold sweat, paleness, fainting, or pain or pressure in your upper body or chest while or just after exercise. Also, on hot, humid days, do outdoor activities during the cooler and less humid parts of the day. Wear light, loose fitting clothing and drink plenty of water before, during, and after the activity. On cold days, wear one layer less of clothing than you would wear if you were outside but not physically active. Wear a hat and gloves.

**Keep at it!** Set small, short term goals for yourself to keep motivated to continue. Exercise should be on-going. If you become bored, try doing a different activity. Regular exercise is important to maintain your heart health.

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**Make opportunities to be more physically active.** Some ideas include:

- Use the stairs to go up and down instead of an elevator. Start with one flight and build up to more.
- Park farther away from your destination and walk the rest of the way.
- Instead of eating an extra snack, take a brisk walk.
- Do housework, such as vacuuming, at a brisk pace.
- Mow your own lawn.
- Carry your own groceries.
- Take an exercise break—get up and stretch, walk around and give your muscles and mind a chance to relax.

**Sample Walking Program**

WEEK	MINUTES	DAYS
1-2	5-10	4-5
3-4	10-15	4-5
5-6	15-20	5-6
7-8	20-25	5-7
9-10	25-30	5-7

For those patients with congestive heart failure, exercise is important, but it will need to be balanced with periods of rest. Make sure you take 30 minute rest periods after meals and throughout the day. Sitting exercises may be easiest for you. Simple exercises like ankle pumps, knee extension, hip/knee bends, trunk rotations, arm/shoulder lifts, and shoulder circles are good exercises to start with. Also, during hot, humid weather, a slower pace may be necessary.