

Activity and Your Heart

Your heart is a muscle that works day and night to deliver oxygen and nutrients to your body. When you have a heart attack, part of your heart muscle gets damaged and forms thick scar tissue.

Exercising after a heart attack keeps your heart healthy by helping it gain muscle instead of scar tissue and leads to a better recovery.

Increasing physical activity helps control risk factors like high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, combats stress, and helps prevent heart attacks.

You don't need to go to a gym to be active. Find a physical activity that you enjoy and get better at it. You won't even realize that you're building up your exercise tolerance or "fitness."



Your exercise routine should include both aerobic exercise and resistance training. Aerobic exercise is also known as "cardio," and includes activities that make your breathing and heartbeat faster. Resistance training is basically "weights," and helps build strength and confidence in your recovery. In general, we recommend about five days of 30-minute moderate-intensity aerobic exercise, and two days of light resistance training per week.

These are some practical moderate-intensity exercises that you can do after a heart attack:

- Brisk walking outside or on a treadmill at around 3 mph
- Mall walking
- Vacuuming for 20-30 minutes
- Climbing up and down the stairs
- General gardening like raking

Warm-up before exercising. Start your exercise off slowly for 5 minutes to prevent putting too much load on your heart. While exercising, you should feel slightly out of breath, but not gasping for air. You should feel your heart pumping faster, but no chest pain or pressure. Another way to tell if you are at the right intensity is if you can talk but not sing during exercise. Cool down for 5-10 minutes after your workout.

Don't overdo the weight training; a couple of times a week is enough. There are many levels of resistance training, and it's ok to begin small. You can lift weights, starting at around 3-5 pounds in each arm. You should comfortably be able to do 10 repetitions. Remember to breathe and be careful not to hold your breath while you lift; this reduces blood flow and increases the load on your heart.

Find ways to be active in your everyday routine. Use the stairs instead of the elevator, get off a transit stop early or park further away from your destination and walk the rest of the way, take a walk at lunch, use your home exercise equipment, exercise along with a training video, walk your pet, or take an evening walk with your family.

Do not shovel snow in the cold. This puts too much load on your heart.

You should ease into your activity of choice. Don't try to do too much too fast. Start at a comfortable level and work your way up. Work with your body and pay attention to how you feel. If your body says it is too much, then slow down.

Remember, your only competition is with yourself. All exercise helps keep your heart healthy. If you have a more sedentary lifestyle, getting up once every half an hour to walk around is a good start. If you are very active and have a high exercise tolerance, you may be able to do more vigorous exercise. The goal is to build up your fitness, no matter what your starting point is.

You may have been given an exercise prescription, i.e., your heart rate range during activity, based on your treadmill stress test result after your rehab visit. If you have not yet attended rehab, you can still set initial goals after talking to your doctor.

Action Plan

- Choose an activity that you can repeat every day.
- Set a goal for your activity and fine-tune it with your cardiac rehab team.
- Increase the intensity of your activity a little bit every day.
- Measure and write down your heart rate before you start climbing stairs and again at the top of the stairs; write down the number of minutes it takes to get back to your resting heart rate.
- Use a step counter/pedometer on your phone while walking for a goal of around 7000-10000 steps per day.

Links

[How much Physical Activity do you need](#)

[Exercise after a Heart Attack](#)

[Pedometer Information](#)