

Cardiovascular Health risk & Physical Activity

If you have increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease then you will reduce your risk of heart attack, angina, stroke and peripheral vascular disease by becoming regularly active. Developing diabetes and kidney problems is also a concern. You need to stop smoking if you smoke, eat a healthier diet, keep your waist in check, cut back if you drink a lot of alcohol and take regular physical activity.

Regular activity reduces risk of developing cardiovascular disease by 35%¹. Activity has a positive effect on the risk factors of cardiovascular disease including high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, high blood sugars (by improving the body's natural regulatory system), having a family history of heart disease, smoking and increased body fat (in particular having lots of fat around the middle).

Just like smoking and obesity, being 'inactive' is a serious threat to life. Your health risk will start to improve as soon as you move more; unlike many




other medical therapies, physical activity protects and treats every part of the body.

Regular physical activity also gives you more energy, builds confidence and can help you to sleep more soundly at night. You can combine your activity time with family and friends or use it as an opportunity to reflect on things and listen to your favourite music.



Physical Activity Recommendations for currently inactive adults with increased cardiovascular risk

Aim to do the following three types of activity:

-  **Aerobic activity** at relative moderate intensity for at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week – one way to approach this is to do 30 minutes on at least five days each week.
-  **Muscle strengthening activity** on two or more days a week which work all major muscles groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulder and arms)
-  **Flexibility exercises** on a daily basis



Do not worry if you struggle to meet the recommendations, because by trying to become more active, you are still gaining some health benefits



Plan your lifestyle change

Keep it simple: Don't make drastic commitments. Choose activities that are easy, simple and enjoyable to maintain.

Set a goal and monitor: Set weekly targets that are achievable and keep a record of what you do. If you fail, create barriers to the things that stop you from reaching them.

Go Public: Discuss your goals and activities with others to keep you motivated for longer.

See 'Getting started' at www.prescription4exercise.com for useful tips on planning your next move.



Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity, also known as endurance activity, is when large muscle movements, maintained over a period of time, make the heart and lungs work harder.

Activity Type? – Any type that you can maintain comfortably is ideal. Choose exercises that you enjoy, such as walking, cycling or group fitness classes. Aerobic activities are really important if you want to improve the health of your heart and circulation.

How long (duration)? – One approach to meet the recommendations is to do at least 30 minutes per day. You can split your sessions to a minimum of 10 minutes to reach your total. If you have been inactive for a long time, start with short sessions and increase the time as your body allows and you feel more confident.

Remember not to sit for hours. A regular break from sitting every hour is healthy.

How hard (intensity)? – Try to progress gradually over time to a relatively moderate-intensity activity. Doing moderate intensity activity means that you feel warm, mildly out of breath and mildly sweaty. The ‘talk test’ is a simple way to measure moderate intensity. Whilst you are working, you can still talk, but not sing, during the activity.

How often (frequency)? – if you aim to do 30 minutes per day then do this at least 5 times per week so that you can reach a total of 150 mins a week. Distribute sessions over the week and aim to have no more than 2 consecutive days without physical activity. When you start any new activity make sure you give your body enough time to recover and adapt between sessions.



Muscle Strengthening and Flexibility

Activities that promote strengthening and flexibility are vital for a complete physical activity programme. Being stronger and more flexible helps you to achieve aerobic activities, such as brisk walking or swimming, more successfully. You can find some notes and videos for some simple ‘Strength and Flexibility Exercises’ at www.prescription4exercise.com.

*See prescription4exercise.com for video examples of **strengthening and flexibility** exercises you can do at home



Choosing the right activity

Where to start? Try to choose activities that are local, enjoyable and practical.
Visit the website for plenty of ideas and choices of things to do new you.

Safety considerations

- If you have led a very sedentary lifestyle, begin by doing low intensity exercise of short duration, e.g. 10 minutes. Increase your level of activity gradually to avoid injury
- Stop exercising if you feel dizzy, sick, unwell or very tired.
- See a doctor if you are having chest pain, black outs or breathlessness on mild exertion.

If you have any other long term health conditions ask your healthcare professional and/or visit www.prescription4exercise.com for additional useful safety considerations

References

1. Department of Health and Human Services (2008) Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Report, Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services

Further reading

- Start Active, Stay Active - a report on physical activity for health from the ‘four home countries’ Chief Medical Officers. UK Department of Health, July 2011. www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_128209
- ACSM’s Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription, American College of Sports Medicine, 2009

Other useful websites

www.bhf.org.uk

Visit www.prescription4exercise.com to learn more about physical activity and how it can prevent and treat many long term conditions.

This leaflet has been provided for information only. ALWAYS check with your doctor if you have any concerns about your condition or treatment. Prescription4exercise.com is not responsible or liable, directly or indirectly, for ANY form of damages whatsoever resulting from the use (or misuse) of information contained in or implied by this information.