

How to Start an Exercise Program

How much exercise should I get?

The exercise goal for most adults is 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week. Ask your health care provider how much is right for you, especially if you have heart disease or other health care concerns. You may also choose to measure steps per day using a pedometer to monitor your progress. 10,000 steps a day, most days of the week, is a similar goal to the one listed above.

My exercise goal is: _____ min. per day _____ days of the week.

How do I get started?

Your health care provider can help you find out whether or not you need to do a stress test before starting an exercise program. This is very important if you have not been active for some time or if you have health problems.

Pick an exercise that you like to do. Be realistic given the climate you live in and any physical limitations you may have. Examples of moderate-intensity exercises that may help your heart include: walking, jogging, swimming, bicycling, rowing, tennis, and dancing. You may want to choose more than one activity to prevent boredom and for bad weather days!

Exercise types I can do: _____

Start slowly and gradually build up your time to the daily/weekly target above. If you have not exercised for some time, start with 10 minutes a day of light to moderate exercise. Try to add 3-5 minutes to your daily exercise after the first week. Continue to add time this way until you are able to exercise for at least 30 minutes. At 30 minutes, you may also wish to increase how hard you are working (known as exercise intensity).

How hard should I exercise?

Your health care provider may show you how to measure your heart rate and give you a target heart rate to reach during exercise. You can also measure how hard you are working using the perceived exertion scale shown below.

Borg Scale for Rating Perceived Exertion	6	No exertion	WARM UP AND COOL DOWN RANGE	To use this scale, rate your overall effort or how hard your body is working while you exercise. A range between “12-14” or “somewhat hard” is generally recommended to achieve the most benefit from physical activity. Ask your health care provider which level is best for you.
	7	Extremely light		
	8			
	9	Very light		
	10		EXERCISING RANGE	
	11	Light		
	12			
	13	Somewhat hard		
	14			
	15	Hard		
	16		OVERDOING IT RANGE: slow down	
	17	Very hard		
	18			
	19	Extremely hard		
	20	Maximal exertion		

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How to Start an Exercise Program *(cont)*

Other tips for monitoring your exercise intensity

The talk test	If you are so short of breath and can't keep up a conversation or hum a song, you are overdoing it.
Symptoms	If you feel chest pain, nausea, shortness of breath (not just breathing harder) or become dizzy with exercise, slow down and/or stop what you are doing. Report these symptoms to your health care provider. Feeling very tired or having muscle or joint pain during or after exercise, may also be signs that you are overdoing it. These signs should be reported to your health care provider.
Warm up and cool down	The first several minutes of your exercise should be done at a slower pace. This allows you to build up to your target heart rate level or your goal of perceived exertion. The last few minutes of your exercise should also be at a slower pace. Slow down from a jog to a walk, for example, before you come to a complete stop. Following these guidelines allows for a gradual change in heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rate.
Fit activity into your day	Being active throughout your day is another way to reach your target exercise/activity minutes. • Take the stairs instead of the elevator • Go for a walk during your work breaks • Park farther away from buildings • Walk to your co-workers' offices instead of phoning or e-mailing them A pedometer allows you to measure how much activity you are getting throughout your day. If you note when you get home in the evening that you are short your 10,000 steps, go for a walk to reach your goal (5000 steps = approximately 2½ miles).

Based on 2008 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. Available at <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines> Accessed Jun. 7, 2009.