



# Why People with Heart Failure Should Exercise

## Exercise for your health

Exercise is a planned physical activity. All types of exercise involve increasing the heart rate and strengthening muscles. Exercise is intended to improve or maintain fitness or health.

## Why exercise is important

No matter how old you are, exercise benefits your heart failure in a number of ways.

Exercise helps you to:

- Sleep better
- Feel less tired
- Breathe better
- Lower your blood pressure
- Strengthen your muscles and bones
- Reduce stress and tension
- Reduce feelings of anxiety or depression

When you increase your fitness and health, you improve your quality of life.

## Types of exercise

Some exercises focus more on increasing the heart rate and blood flow. Others focus on increasing strength. Many exercises are a combination of both.

### Aerobic Exercise

Any steady physical activity that increases your heart rate for at least 10 minutes is an aerobic or cardiovascular exercise ('cardio' meaning heart, 'vascular' meaning blood flow). Aerobic exercise improves your body's ability to use oxygen. Over time, your heart will not have to work as hard as it did. You can do more and feel better!



### Strength exercise

Any time you contract a muscle against resistance such as weight or gravity is a strength exercise. Once you have a routine of aerobic exercise, adding strength exercise can improve your overall fitness.



### Getting started

- ♥ **Always check with your healthcare provider** first before starting an exercise routine.
- ♥ Choose an exercise you enjoy.  
Examples of aerobic exercise: walking outside or on a treadmill, using an exercise bike, swimming  
Examples of strength exercise: doing wall push-ups, doing leg lifts, using resistance tubing, lifting free-weights
- ♥ Check your Heart Failure Zone before you start every exercise session.
- ♥ Exercise only if you are in the 'Green Zone'.
- ♥ Start slowly with what you can do (not what you think you should do) and pace yourself.
- ♥ Aim to exercise most days of the week.
- ♥ Aim to exercise for at least 30 minutes each day.
- ♥ Take rest breaks when you need them.



## Starting aerobic exercise

### Step 1 Warm up.

Take at least 5 minutes to warm up. This prepares your heart and body for the extra work. This means walk or cycle slowly for 5 minutes.

### Step 2 Condition yourself.

Gradually increase the exercise to a steady, moderate pace. Aim for continuous exercise for up to 30 minutes.

### Step 3 Cool down.

Take 5 to 10 minutes to slow down your exercise. This helps your heart slowly return back to your resting heart rate.

## Starting strength exercise

It is best to have a cardiac rehabilitation professional help you start strength exercises. You will learn the proper way to do the exercise.

- Generally:
- Choose 6 to 8 basic strength exercises for the larger muscle groups of both the upper and lower body.
  - Start with low resistance or light weights.
  - Repeat each exercise only 10 to 15 times.
  - Do your strength exercise routine 1 to 3 times a week with rest days in between.

## Balance exercise and rest

- ♥ If you are tired either right after you exercise or the next day, you have done too much. Cut back a little on the amount you exercise and progress more slowly.
- ♥ Exercise at a time when you feel rested. It could be first thing in the morning or after a nap.
- ♥ It may take your body a while to find a balance between exercise and rest, so don't give up.

## How hard to exercise

- ♥ Get to know your body. Pay attention to how exercise makes you feel. As long as you have enough breath to carry on a conversation, the exercise level is okay.
- ♥ Use the table below as a way of measuring your effort.
- ♥ Aim to stay within the 3 to 5 scale during your exercise.

Rate your exercise effort	Talk Test	
0	Nothing at all	Resting
0.5	Very, very easy	<b>Sing</b>
1	Very easy	You have enough breath to sing
2	Easy	
3	Moderate	<b>Talk</b>
4	Somewhat hard	You have enough breath to carry on a conversation
5	Hard	
6		<b>Gasp</b>
7	Very hard	You cannot say more than 4 to 6 words without gasping
8		You cannot say more than 2 to 3 words without gasping
9	Very, very hard	
10	Maximum	You cannot talk at all

## When to stop an exercise

Stop the exercise if:

- ✗ You feel lightheaded or dizzy.
- ✗ You feel more tired than usual.
- ✗ You feel more short of breath than usual.

Call 9-1-1 if:

- ✗ You feel pressure or pain in your chest, neck, jaw, or shoulders that does not go away with rest or medicine.
- ✗ You have a fast heartbeat that does not slow down with rest.
- ✗ You feel like throwing up (nauseated).
- ✗ You feel your heart skipping beats and this is new for you.
- ✗ You get a shock from your implanted heart device (ICD).

## Tips for exercise

- ✓ Stick with it, so it becomes a habit.
- ✓ Schedule exercise sessions into your daily routine.
- ✓ Exercise at the same time each day.
- ✓ Include a variety of exercises so you do not get bored.
- ✓ Wear loose, comfortable clothing and supportive shoes.
- ✓ Choose to walk whenever you can instead of driving.
- ✓ Choose the stairs instead of the elevator.
- ✓ Wait 1 hour after eating a meal to exercise.
- ✓ Adjust your pace when walking in hilly areas.
- ✓ Exercise indoors when it is too cold, too hot, or too humid outside.
- ✓ Count the fluids you drink during the activity as part of your daily fluid amount.
- ✓ Keep an exercise record. This helps you see your progress.

## When you don't feel confident doing exercises on your own

There are many community-based programs designed specifically for people with heart disease. They are usually called cardiac rehabilitation programs.



To find a program in your community:

- Talk to your healthcare provider.
- Call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.
- Go to the HealthLink BC website ([www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca)).
  - Go to the 'Find Services' section of the home page.
  - Type 'cardiac rehabilitation' in the 'What?' box.
  - Type your location in the 'Where?' box.
  - Click on the 'Find' button.
  - Choose a program.

## Learn more about the importance of exercise

- ♥ Review 'Heart Failure: Activity and Exercise' on the HealthLink BC website ([www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca)).
  - Go to the 'Search Health Information' section of the home page.
  - Type 'heart failure exercise' in the 'All Health Topics' search box.
- ♥ Check the BC Heart Failure Network website.