

The Wild Heart



H E A R T C A R I N G

Hunting and fishing are more than just hobbies. In fact, they can be very strenuous, physically demanding sports. Just like all forms of exercise, if you don't prepare yourself, your heart could be at risk.

To our ancestors, hunting and fishing were more than just recreational sports. Hunters relied on their efforts to feed their families. Unfortunately, our modern-day lifestyles don't encourage physical fitness, and many of us prefer to drive our ATVs rather than walk.

Hunters of the past would be out days at a time, killing their game and hauling it back home. Could the average hunter perform like that today? Probably not. Most of us are not as physically fit as our predecessors, and that can be dangerous if we embark on an outdoor adventure when we are not physically prepared.

Today, activities like climbing into tree stands, trekking through the woods and dragging your prize back home can spike your heart rate to levels you might not be accustomed to. That's why it's important to visit your doctor to make sure you are prepared for the hunt, just like you would prior to any vigorous activity.

There are several strategies to keep you on top of your outdoor sports game:

Consider conditioning

If you want to increase your luck for a safe and successful hunt, consider conditioning before your next outdoor adventure.

Conditioning exercises are body movements that increase athletic skill and fitness while decreasing your chances of sports injuries. Programs may include weight training, calisthenics and exercises based on real-life motions. Types of conditioning exercises may vary greatly depending on your goals, and are adaptable to any level of fitness. Beginners and experienced athletes benefit from conditioning. Hiking and brisk walking are typical hunting activities, so including conditioning in your regular workout is essential.

Make a muscle

Remember, your heart is a muscle. It needs to work in order to stay in shape. Strength training can help build balance and increase stability. Strong muscles perform better under stress and can help to reduce and prevent lower back pain while trekking across woodlands or climbing up tree stands.

Cardio is king

Adding a regular run, walk, bike ride or swim to your health routine will improve your stamina while hunting. Regular cardio exercise can keep you in shape, making your hunting trips less strenuous, more fun and safer.

Stretch it out

Stretching is often overlooked in training, but it is important to hunters.

Being limber keeps muscles and bones from getting stiff, especially after sitting or standing for long periods of time. It's important to stretch before and after a day in the woods to keep your movements steady and smooth.

Work your plan

Before you start a heart-healthy hunting fitness program, do the following:

- Get a medical checkup, especially if you're over 40 or have a history of heart disease or other health problems.
- Start slowly. The goal is to develop a lifelong program that you can make part of your routine.
- Choose regular activities that you enjoy. Jogging, bike riding and cross-country skiing are great activities to help your hunting game.
- Park your ATV back at camp, and hunt on foot. Experience your sport in the way it was meant to be enjoyed: safely, quietly and carefully.

A healthy heart is your safest strategy

Here are some strategies to ensure you are prepared for your next outdoor adventure:

- Don't overexert yourself. Pace yourself and take frequent breaks.
- Don't smoke during the hunt. Smoking speeds up your heart rate and reduces oxygen flow to the body. It's a bad habit in general, let alone while you're performing exercise.
- Ask for help in bringing home your game to avoid exhaustion.
- Know the symptoms of a heart attack. Devise a plan for the event of an emergency before going out into the woods. If you or a fellow hunter are experiencing chest pain or dizziness, do not ignore it and immediately seek medical attention.

Healthy heart, happy hunting

Hunters are the world's original athletes, and it's important that their hearts are healthy so they can perform to the best of their ability.

Visit your doctor for regular checkups to be sure you are always on top of your game.

