

# Have a Ball Exercising



**W**ant to know what you can do to improve your heart health, decrease risk factors for cardiovascular disease and strengthen your feeling of overall well-being? Exercise.

The American Heart Association suggests 150 minutes of moderate, or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per

week, which is about thirty minutes a day for five days a week. For those attempting to lower their blood pressure, 40 minutes of aerobic exercise is recommended three to four times a week, which can lower the risk for heart attack and stroke.

### Types of heart-healthy exercise

Physical activity is literally anything that keeps the body in motion and burning calories. Here are some of the best exercises you can do for your heart:

**Walking, jogging and running.** Walking is a great, low-impact way to get your body moving. Regular walking can improve your cholesterol, lower blood pressure, increase your overall energy, boost bone strength and curb weight gain. Jogging and running also have the same benefits, but can be a more vigorous way to get your heart rate up.

**Strength and resistance training.** For the best overall stamina and flexibility exercises, look for activities that challenge your strength, as well as your ability to stretch. The American Heart Association recommends strength training about twice per week. Strength training can increase strength in bones, muscles and connective tissues (tendons and ligaments), and therefore lower risk for injury. It can also increase muscle mass and improve metabolism.

**Stretching flexibility exercises.** Stretching your muscles to increase flexibility can provide both physical and mental health benefits. It is known to lower blood pressure, increase lung capacity, improve respiratory function, boost circulation and tone muscles. Although stretching and flexibility are important to any exercise program, most forms of stretching do not count toward the 150-minutes-per-week of recommended physical activity, because they do not raise heart rate enough. So be sure to incorporate cardiovascular exercises as well.

**Bicycling, swimming and dancing** are also great forms of exercise to spice up your fitness routine. When is the last time you played kickball, softball or soccer? Why not involve the entire family in a fun game of these childhood sports for the cardiovascular benefits and to make memories with your kids?

### Heart rate

Your pulse is one tool to help get a picture of your health. Even if you're not an athlete, knowledge about your heart rate can help you monitor your fitness level — and it might even help you spot developing health problems.

Your heart rate, or pulse, is the number of times your heart beats per minute. Normal heart rate varies from person to person. Knowing your heart rate can be an important heart-health gauge.

The best places to find your pulse are:

- Wrists
- Inside of your elbow
- Side of your neck
- Top of the foot

To get the most accurate reading, put your finger over your pulse and count the number of beats in 60 seconds.

Your **resting heart rate** is the heart pumping the lowest amount of blood you need because you're not exercising. If you're sitting or lying, and you're calm, relaxed and aren't ill, your heart rate is normally between 60 (beats per minute) and 100 (beats per minute).

But a heart rate lower than 60 doesn't usually signal a medical problem. It could be the result of taking a drug such as a beta blocker. A lower heart rate is also common for people who get a lot of physical activity or are very athletic. Active people often have lower heart rates because their heart muscle is in better condition and doesn't need to work as hard to maintain a steady beat.

### Get in the zone

You gain the most benefits and lessen the risks when you exercise in your target heart-rate zone. Usually, this is when your exercise heart rate (pulse) is 60%–80% of your maximum heart rate. In some cases, your doctor may decrease your target heart-rate zone to 50%.

Be careful not to exceed your target heart rate. This increases both cardiovascular and orthopedic risk and does not add any extra benefit. Instead, slow down until your heart rate gets into the proper range.

When beginning an exercise program, you may need to gradually build up to a level that is within your target heart-rate zone, especially if you have not exercised regularly before. If the exercise feels too hard, slow down. You will reduce your risk of injury and enjoy the exercise more if you don't try to overdo it.

**Check with your doctor before starting an exercise program. They can help you find a program and target heart-rate zone that match your needs, goals and physical condition.**

