

Exercise and the Heart

Heart disease is the leading single cause of death in Australia. The risk of heart disease can be reduced by regular daily exercise, which helps lower blood pressure, blood cholesterol and body weight. A combination of regular exercise and healthy eating gives even greater protection against heart disease.

Benefits of exercise

Regular exercise provides many health benefits including:

- Lower blood pressure
- Lower blood cholesterol
- Lower risk of or better control of heart disease
- Lower risk of or better control of diabetes
- Lower risk of some cancers
- Better weight control
- Stronger and healthier bones, muscles and joints, which reduces the risk of falls and injuries
- Better posture
- Increased feelings of wellbeing and relief of stress, anxiety and depression



- More energy
- Better sleep.

Regular physical activity is important for all people, no matter what their age, weight, health problems or abilities. Regular physical activity during

childhood and teenage years helps prevent high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and heart disease in adulthood. Regular physical activity also helps older people to stay healthy, independent and socially active.

How much exercise?

For health benefits, health authorities recommend that adults get at least 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity physical exercise on all or most days of the week.

Moderate-intensity exercise is exercise that involves some effort. It causes a slight but obvious increase in breathing rate, while still being able to talk comfortably (e.g. brisk walking, medium-paced cycling or swimming, mowing the lawn, digging the garden). Physiotherapists and other trained health and fitness professionals can advise on the different types of exercise (e.g. aerobic, weight bearing, resistance).

For children and teenagers, health authorities recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

Getting started

- It is never too late to start or increase exercise and every little bit helps. Plan your exercise. Choose activities that you enjoy and that you will want to and be able to continue.
- Think of exercise as an opportunity to improve health and wellbeing, and not as a waste of time.

- Be active every day in as many ways as you can (e.g. walk or cycle instead of driving, use stairs instead of lifts; park your car 10-15 minutes from work and walk the last part).
- Your daily exercise need not be all in one session. If you are busy, aim to be active for several 10-15 minute sessions throughout the day (e.g. 10 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes at lunchtime and 10 minutes after work).

Fitness and weight loss

Our heart, lungs, muscles and bones need at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise, on all or most days of the week, to stay in good working order.

To help manage body weight and prevent weight gain, adults usually need at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical exercise every day, combined with healthy eating.

Regular, vigorous-intensity exercise promotes extra fitness and weight loss, and gives extra protection against heart disease. Vigorous exercise increases your pulse rate and breathing so that you puff and pant. For the best results, you need to do vigorous exercise for at least 30 minutes on three or four days a week.

Note: 'Vigorous' exercise is not usually recommended for people with heart disease – ask a doctor for advice.

Self care

- Spend at least 30 minutes a day walking briskly. Go to different places to make it interesting.
- Relax while you walk, let your thoughts wander and breathe deeply.
- Drink plenty of fluid before, during and after exercise. Avoid alcohol and caffeine-containing drinks (e.g. tea, coffee, cola, energy drinks) as these can cause your body to lose fluid.
- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes made for walking or running.
- Warm up before starting your exercise and cool down with stretching afterwards. This will help avoid muscle cramps, stiffness, aches and pains.
- Do not exercise with injuries or if you feel pain or discomfort. Consult a doctor or physiotherapist for advice.
- Exercise at cooler times of the day.
- Make exercise fun (e.g. exercise with a friend; join a class or a club).
- Reward yourself (in a healthy way) when you have kept to your exercise plan.
- Eat regular healthy meals, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and wholegrain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises not to).
- Don't smoke.
- Limit alcohol consumption.

If you have a medical condition, wear identification (e.g. a *MedicAlert* bracelet) that states your condition.

Important

Get advice from a doctor before starting an exercise program if you:

- Have, or think you have, heart disease
- Have a close relative with heart disease
- Are overweight
- Are over 45 years old
- Have had a stroke
- Have high blood pressure
- Have any medical conditions, past or present, which may interfere with exercising
- Smoke – think about quitting
- Have not exercised regularly for a while
- Are pregnant.

If exercise causes chest tightness/discomfort or pain, causes your heart to beat too fast, makes you breathless, dizzy or nauseous or gives you cramp-like pain, stop straight away and seek medical advice.

Some signs of a heart attack

- Pain, pressure, heaviness or tightness in your chest, neck, jaw, arm(s), back or shoulders.
- You may also feel nauseous, dizzy, short of breath or a cold sweat.

If you experience the warning signs of heart attack for 10 minutes, if they are severe or get worse, phone 000 for an ambulance (or dial 112 on a mobile phone outside network coverage area)

For more information

The Heart Foundation

Phone: 1300 36 27 87

Website: www.heartfoundation.com.au

A Healthy and Active Australia

Website: www.healthyactive.gov.au

MedicAlert Foundation

Phone: 1800 88 22 22

Website: www.medicalert.org.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

NPS: Better choices, Better health

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts.

Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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Your Self Care Pharmacy: