

The Do's and Don'ts of Exercise



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Should I see a doctor before I start exercising?

Most people do not need to see a doctor before they start exercising since a gradual, sensible exercise program will have minimal health risks. However, there are some people who should seek medical advice.

To find out if you should talk with a doctor before you start, use the following check list:

- You have not seen your primary care doctor in the last 12 months.
- Your doctor said you have heart trouble, a heart murmur, or you have had a heart attack.
- You often have pains or pressure in the left mid-chest area, left neck, shoulder, or arm during or right after you exercise.
- You often feel faint or have spells of severe dizziness.
- You have extreme breathlessness after mild exertion.
- Your doctor said your blood pressure was too high or is not under control, or you do not know whether or not your blood pressure is normal.
- Your doctor said you have bone or joint problems, such as arthritis.
- You are over age 60 and are not used to vigorous exercise.
- You have a family history (parents, siblings) of coronary artery disease at an early age - 55 or younger for men, 65 or younger for women.
- You have a medical condition which might need special attention in an exercise program, such as insulin dependent diabetes.
- You are pregnant or have given birth less than 3 months ago.



If you have checked one or more items above, talk to your doctor before you start. If you have not checked items, you can start on a gradual, sensible exercise program tailored to your needs.

What exercises help me condition my heart and lungs?

Exercises that condition your heart and lungs have three key characteristics. These activities are:

- Brisk: Raising your heart and breathing rates.
- Sustained: Done at least 15 to 30 minutes without interruption.
- Regular: Repeated at least three times per week.

These exercises:

- Are **aerobic**, meaning they increase your heart rate and your body's use of oxygen to improve your physical fitness.
- Use the large muscles of your legs and arms.
- Need to be done for at least 30 minutes, three times a week.
- Burn a lot of calories to help you control your weight.
- Reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers.
- Strengthen your bones and muscles.
- Improve your mental health and mood.

Examples of aerobic exercises are:

- Bicycling
- Cross-country skiing
- Hiking (uphill)
- Ice hockey
- Jogging
- Jumping rope
- Rowing
- Running in place
- Stationary cycling
- Swimming
- Tennis (singles)
- Walking

How do I begin?

The key to a successful exercise program is choosing activities that you will enjoy. Here are some questions that can help you choose the right kind of exercise for you:

- **How physically fit are you?**

If you have been inactive for a while, you may want to start with walking, bicycling, or swimming rather than jogging or jumping rope. Beginning with less strenuous activities will allow you to become more fit without straining your body. Once you have gotten into better shape, you can change to a more vigorous activity if you wish.

- **How old are you?**

If you are over 40 and have not been active, avoid strenuous programs, such as jogging, when you first start. For the first few months, build up the length and intensity of your exercise gradually.

If you are over 60, walking and swimming are especially good forms of exercise.

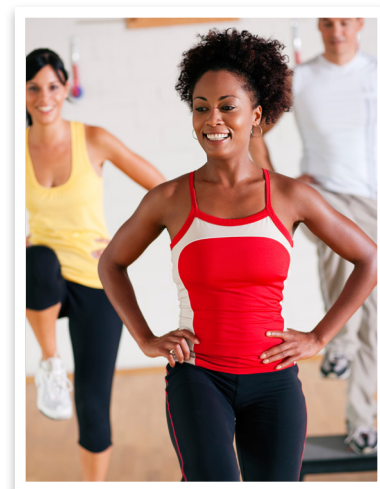
- **What goals do you want from exercising?**

Set short term goals for yourself. Think about what long term goals you want to achieve from exercise.



- **Do you like to exercise alone or with other people?**

Do you like individual activities such as swimming, team sports such as soccer, or two-person activities such as racquetball? Companionship can help you get started and keep you going. If you would like to exercise with someone else, can you find a partner easily and quickly? If not, consider choosing another activity, at least until you can find a partner.



- **Do you prefer to exercise outdoors or indoors?**

Outdoor exercise offers variety in scenery and weather. Indoor activities offer shelter from the weather and can offer the convenience of exercising at home, such as with stationary cycling. Some activities, such as running or jumping rope, can be done outdoors or indoors. If your activity can be affected by the weather, consider choosing an alternate activity also. You can switch activities then and still stay on your regular exercise schedule.

- **How much money are you willing to spend for sports equipment or facilities?**

Many activities require little or no equipment. For example, brisk walking only requires a comfortable pair of walking shoes. Also, many communities offer free or inexpensive recreation facilities and physical activity classes.

- **When can you best fit the activity into your schedule?**

Do you feel more like exercising in the morning, afternoon, or evening? Consider moving other activities around. Schedule your exercise as a regular part of your activities. Remember that exercise sessions are spread out over the week and need not take more than 25 to 40 minutes at a time. By choosing activities you like, you will be much more likely to exercise regularly, keep on exercising, and enjoy its many benefits.

How do I pace myself?

Build up slowly. If you have been inactive for a long while, remember it will take time to get into shape. But no matter where you begin, you will be able to build up your exercise time or pace as your body becomes more fit. Just remember that you will feel more fit after a few weeks than when you first started.

How hard should I exercise?

You can find out how hard to exercise by keeping track of your heart rate. Your **maximum heart rate** is the fastest your heart can beat. Your maximum heart rate is usually 220 minus your age.

Your activity level should result in a heart rate of 60% to 85% of this maximum heart rate. This is called your **target zone**.

For example, if you are 50 years old, your maximum heart rate is 170 beats per minute. Your target zone is 102 to 144 beats per minute (60% to 85% of 170).

To see if you are exercising within your target zone, take your pulse during or right after you stop exercising (before you cool down).

- If your pulse is below your target zone, exercise a little harder the next time.
- If your pulse is above your target zone, exercise a little lighter.
- If your pulse falls within your target zone, you are doing fine.

If you are on blood pressure medicines, you should not use target heart rate. Instead, exercise at a rate that feels fairly light to somewhat hard.



How long should I exercise?

Each exercise session should last about 25 to 40 minutes and include:

Warm Up	5 minutes	Begin exercising slowly to give your body a chance to warm up and get ready for more vigorous exercise. Start at a medium pace and gradually increase it by the end of the 5-minute warm up.
Exercise within Your Target Zone	30 minutes	30 minutes is your goal. Build up your exercising time gradually over weeks until you reach your goal. Start out by doing this three days each week, and then build up to five days per week.
Cool Down	5 minutes	<p>After exercising within your target zone, slow down gradually. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you swim, swim more slowly or change to a more leisurely stroke. • If you have been walking briskly, running, or jumping rope, slow down by changing to a slow to moderate walk. <p>This gives your body time to slow its heart rate gradually.</p> <p>End your 5-minute cool down with stretches to help prevent sore, tight muscles.</p>

Total **40 minutes**

How often should I exercise?

Exercising regularly is one of the most important aspects of your exercise program. If you do not exercise at least three times a week, you will not get as many of the benefits of regular, vigorous physical activity as you could, or make as much progress. Try to spread your exercise sessions throughout the week to maximize the benefits.

What if I miss a few sessions?

Whenever you miss a few sessions (more than a week), you will need to resume exercising at a lower level than before.

Whatever the reasons for missing sessions, do not worry about the missed days. Just get back into your routine and renew your commitment to health every day.

What precautions should I take to avoid injuries?

The most powerful medicine for injuries is prevention. Here are some effective ways to avoid injuries:

- **Build up your level of activity gradually over weeks.**
 - Try not to set your goals too high. Otherwise, you will be tempted to push yourself too far too quickly.
 - With each exercise session, build up slowly to your target zone and cool down slowly afterwards. This will help to prevent muscle and joint soreness.
- **Listen to your body.**
 - Exercising too much can cause injuries to joints, feet, ankles, and legs. Do not make the mistake of exercising beyond early warning pains in these areas, or more serious injuries may result.
- **Be aware of possible signs of heart problems such as:**
 - Pain or pressure in the left mid-chest area, left neck, shoulder, or arm during or just after exercising.
 - Sudden dizziness, cold sweat, pallor, or fainting.

Ignoring these signs and continuing to exercise may lead to serious heart problems. Should any of these signs occur, stop exercising and call your doctor.

- **For outdoor activities, take precautions under special weather conditions.**

On hot, humid days:

- Exercise during cooler parts of the day such as early morning or early evening after the sun has gone down.
- Exercise less than normal for a week until you become adapted to the heat.
- Drink lots of fluids, particularly water. You do not need extra salt because you get enough salt in your diet.

- ▶ Watch out for signs of heat stroke, such as feeling dizzy, weak, light-headed, and/or excessively tired; sweating stops; or body temperature becomes dangerously high.
- ▶ Wear a minimum of light, loose-fitting clothing.
- ▶ Avoid sweatshirts and sweat pants. Such clothing will not help you lose weight any faster by making you sweat more. The weight you lose in fluids by sweating will be quickly replaced as soon as you begin drinking fluids. This type of clothing can also cause dangerous high temperatures, possibly resulting in heat stroke.

On cold days:

- ▶ Wear one layer less of clothing than you would wear if you were outside but not exercising. It is also better to wear several layers of clothing rather than one heavy layer.
- ▶ Use mittens, gloves, or cotton socks to protect your hands.
- ▶ Wear a hat since up to 40% of your body's heat is lost through your neck and head.
- ▶ On rainy, icy, or snowy days, be aware of reduced visibility for yourself and for drivers, and reduced traction on pathways.

Other tips:

- ▶ If you have eaten a meal, avoid exercise for at least one hour before you exercise.
- ▶ After exercise, wait about 15 minutes before eating. Try a snack that contains both a protein and a carbohydrate, and drink plenty of water.
- ▶ Use proper equipment such as goggles to protect your eyes for handball or racquetball, or good running shoes with adequate cushioning in the soles.
- ▶ Hard or uneven surfaces such as cement or rough fields are more likely to cause injuries. Soft, even surfaces such as a level grass field, a dirt path, or a track for running are better for your feet and joints.
- ▶ If you run or jog, land on your heels rather than the balls of your feet. This will minimize the strain on your feet and lower legs.
- ▶ Joggers or walkers should also watch for cars and wear light-colored or reflective clothing during darkness, so drivers can see you. Face oncoming traffic, and do not assume that drivers will notice you on the roadway.
- ▶ If you bicycle, you can help prevent injuries by wearing a helmet and using a headlight, taillight, and reflectors on the wheels at night. Also, ride in the direction of traffic and try to avoid busy streets.
- ▶ Avoid using headphones when exercising outdoors. If you do use headphones, keep one ear free while you exercise to hear traffic.



Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.