



Exercising with chronic heart failure

Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

How to get started

Regular exercise reduces your risk of further heart disease, some cancers, hypertension, stroke, obesity, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis. Exercise helps lower your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar, and helps you maintain and control a healthy weight. Additionally, it assists with improving exercise capacity, heart failure symptoms and sleep quality. Regular exercise also improves your ability to enjoy the activities of daily living, helping to maintain your independence and reduce the risk of immobility due to ill health.

Discuss with your doctor, healthcare provider or cardiac rehabilitation specialist how you can safely and effectively increase your exercise plans to maximize the benefits to your overall health.

If you have been recently discharged from the hospital for heart failure, supervision by an expert team is needed when exercising. If you are unable to carry on any physical activity without discomfort or you experience shortness of breath, fatigue or palpitations at rest, supervision by an expert team is also needed.

Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist and always follow your treatment plan.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely. Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

Be active

Some is good, more is better

How much:	Aim for at least 150-300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75-150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
How hard:	Any movement helps. Start with low and aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to feel slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks every 10-15 minutes during activity. Stop exercising if you feel unwell or experience any angina or chest pain, and follow your healthcare plan as agreed with your doctor.
How long:	Aim to spread out your session throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.

What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: walking, cycling, dancing, swimming, water aerobics, hiking—choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as soccer, tennis, or volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health
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What will it do for me?

Regular exercise helps to reduce your cholesterol level, blood pressure and helps you maintain a healthy weight, all of which significantly reduce your risk of further long-term health problems. Over time, exercise improves your heart and lung function (since your heart won't have to work as hard during exercise) so you can fully enjoy the activities of daily living.

Build strength

How much:	At least twice a week.
How hard:	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time. Take frequent breaks, if necessary. Do not lift weights over the shoulder level or over-grip equipment as both can increase your blood pressure.
How long:	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–20 times. Aim for 1–3 sets of each exercise.
What type:	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. Try fun strength exercises at home, outdoors or in a gym using light weights or resistance bands. Exercises that keep your feet moving will help encourage blood flow.

What will it do for me?

Strength training while keeping your legs moving helps you to exercise your heart and lungs safely and effectively. They help maintain bone, muscle and joint health while improving strength and balance.

Improve balance

How much:	At least three days a week.
How hard:	Try 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10-15 times.
How long:	Hold each balance for 10-30 seconds.
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi, or simple home balance exercises. Balance exercise can be done standing up, using a chair, against a wall or sitting down. Ensure the area you are exercising in and the type of balance exercise is safe.

What will it do for me?

Practising balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries.



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Sedentary living

Reduce the amount of time being sedentary. Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity). It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class to improve your motivation levels and engage in social activities. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer! Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none.**

Helpful resources

The Cardiac Rehabilitation Network of Ontario (CRNO) is a provincial interprofessional association dedicated to the rehabilitation of individuals with cardiovascular disease and the prevention of cardiovascular disease. Find a cardiac rehabilitation program near you. <https://www.crno.ca/directory>

The Heart and Stroke Foundation gives great tips to stay active. <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/healthy-living/stay-active>

Exercise safety

Follow all equipment and exercise guidelines carefully to avoid health problems and injury, and ask your doctor or healthcare provider for support to exercise safely and effectively.

Do not exercise if you have:

- unstable angina
- a resting systolic blood pressure of over 180 mm Hg and / or diastolic blood pressure greater than or equal to 100 mm Hg
- a resting or uncontrolled heart rate greater than 100 beats per minute
- new or uncontrolled atrial or ventricular arrhythmias
- unstable or acute heart failure
- unstable type 2 diabetes
- febrile illness and feel unwell
- symptomatic hypertension such as dizziness or fainting
- decompensated chronic heart failure.

Stop exercising immediately if you experience chest pain, difficulty in breathing, extreme fatigue or angina. Rest and then take any medicines or treatments that your doctor has prescribed for angina or chest pain. **Avoid all lying-down exercises until after your 10–15 minute cool down.**

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Ensure you exercise safely at all times, and ask for assistance if you are unsure about any particular exercises.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.

Scan for more physical activity resources!

