



# Exercising with heart rhythm disturbances

## 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 helps manage heart rhythm disturbances and prevents and treats heart disease, hypertension, stroke, obesity, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. It lowers cholesterol levels and blood pressure, both of which can contribute to heart problems. A regular exercise plan also helps to reduce depression, anxiety and stress, and may enhance your sense of health and wellbeing.

Heart rhythm disturbances are often associated with other heart diseases such as heart failure or coronary artery disease. If you have an underlying heart problem, discuss this with your doctor or heart specialist before developing an exercise plan.

Structure the intensity of your exercise around your symptoms. Inactivity or avoiding exercise due to arrhythmia disturbance, dizziness or fainting episodes can result in a reduction in your cardiovascular fitness and overall health so ask about specialist exercise programs and support from your local cardiac rehabilitation team either in hospital, home or in the community.

**Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.**

## 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

<b>How hard:</b>	Aim for at least <b>150-300</b> minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least <b>75-150</b> 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.
<b>How hard:</b>	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.
<b>How long:</b>	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.

<b>What type:</b>	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: walking, cycling, jogging, 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. Using your large muscles (e.g. legs and trunk) continuously improves your heart and lung function. Alternate between 3–5-minute intervals of easy and hard intensity to maximize the health benefits.
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### What will it do for me?

*Exercise significantly improves your overall cardiovascular fitness and tolerance of rhythm disturbances.*

## Build strength

<b>How much:</b>	At least twice a week.
<b>How hard:</b>	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time. Take frequent breaks, if necessary. Avoid over-gripping or lifting weights over the shoulder level. Stop exercising if you start to feel unwell or experience any angina or chest pain, and follow your healthcare and medicine plan as agreed with your doctor.
<b>How long:</b>	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body, and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Aim for 1–3 sets of each exercise.
<b>What type:</b>	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. Exercises that keep your feet moving help encourage blood flow back to the heart.

### What will it do for me?

*Strength exercises help maintain and improve your ability to do daily tasks comfortably. They help maintain bone, muscle and joint health while improving strength and balance. Strength exercises while keeping your legs moving helps you to exercise your heart and lungs safely and effectively. Avoid exercises that require or encourage holding your breath, such as push-ups, sit-ups, and heavy lifting.*

## Improve balance

<b>How much:</b>	At least three days a week.
<b>How hard:</b>	Try 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10–15 times.
<b>How long:</b>	Hold each balance for 10–30 seconds.
<b>What type:</b>	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.



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## What will it do for me?

*Practicing 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.*

## 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

For more information on cardiac rehabilitation services, contact your local healthcare provider. Details can be found here. <http://www.heartandstroke.ca/servicesandresources/rehabilitation>

HealthLink BC provides tips for staying active with a heart rhythm disturbance. <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating-physical-activity/conditions/heart/heart-arrhythmiasand-exercise>

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

## Exercise safety

Before exercising, ensure you are well hydrated and avoid low blood sugar as both these can make rhythm disturbances worse.

Stop exercising immediately if you experience chest pain, heavy breathing, a sudden drop in blood pressure or severe tiredness, and follow the action and treatment plan agreed with your doctor or healthcare provider. Avoid exercise if you have:

- exercise-induced ventricular arrhythmias
- atrial arrhythmias of high heart rates (>180-200 beats per minute)
- recent onset or un-investigated arrhythmias.

Avoid jogging close to roads, swimming and cycling if you have an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) as there may be a delay between the detection of an arrhythmia and generation of the ICD, which could cause injury to yourself or others.

Pace yourself by alternating exercises. Rotate light workouts, such as short walks, with more strenuous exercises, such as low-impact exercises or swimming.

Avoid exercising outdoors in extreme temperatures or high humidity. When the weather is bad, try exercising indoors at a gym or walking at a mall.

Make sure you adjust your exercise program if it is interrupted for more than just a couple of days. Gradually increase to your regular activity level as tolerated.

Ask your doctor or healthcare provider for more information about how to exercise safely and how to maintain an effective exercise plan.

Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10-15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level. 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 during all exercises and ask for assistance and supervision if you are unsure about any exercise.

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

Scan for more physical activity resources!

