

## Exercise: Being Active When You Have a Chronic Disease



Exercise is good for everyone. But if you have a chronic disease, the benefits of exercise will be even greater for you than for most people. Whether your goal is to live a more active life, to be more independent, to take fewer medicines, or just to feel better, exercise should be a regular part of your life. A safe level of exercise will depend on your health and the stage of your disease. But even a small amount of exercise is better than none.

### What are the benefits of regular exercise?

- It improves cholesterol.
- It lowers your blood pressure.
- It makes your heart stronger and healthier so it can send more blood and oxygen all through your body.
- It helps you control your weight.
- It builds muscle strength so you can be more active.
- It may reduce your need for medicines. This can lower the cost of caring for your disease.

- It reduces stress and lifts your mood.
- If you have diabetes, exercise can help you control your blood sugar.

People with chronic diseases often find that exercise reduces their symptoms. It may also help them avoid depression, which is common in those with long-term diseases.

### Should you see your doctor before you start exercising?

Yes. Before you start any exercise program, see your doctor for a complete physical exam. He or she may want to run some tests. These can help your doctor know how often and how long you should exercise. You may need to check your heart rate when you exercise. Your doctor can tell you how fast your heart rate should be during exercise. There is an easy way to know if your heart rate is at the right level during exercise:

- If you cannot talk and exercise at the same time, you are working too hard.
- If you can talk while you exercise, you are doing fine.
- If you can sing while you exercise, you may not be working hard enough.

### What types of exercise are best?

The three basic types of exercise are:

- **Stretching.** Stretching is good for everyone. It can help you be more flexible and prevent injuries.
- **Strength training.** Lifting light weights can help tone your muscles. Your doctor can advise you about which types of strength training you can do and which types you should avoid.

- Activities that raise your heart rate. These are called aerobic exercise. Most people can do some form of aerobic exercise.

Of the three types, aerobic exercise has the most benefits. Your doctor can suggest a safe level of aerobic exercise for you. Moderate-intensity aerobic exercise is helpful and safe for most people. Some examples include:

- Brisk walking, hiking, and stair climbing.
- Jogging, bicycling, rowing, and swimming.
- Sports such as tennis, soccer, and basketball.

Low-intensity aerobic exercise has a lower risk of injury. This is recommended for people with many types of health problems. Some low-intensity activities are:

- Walking.
- Gardening and other yard work.
- Housework.
- Dancing.
- Water aerobics.

Any exercise program should include:

- A warm-up (such as a short walk) to get your muscles ready to work. And then do some stretches.
- Some aerobic activity.
- A cool-down period to let your body recover.

## How can you exercise safely?

- Start out slowly. Over time, you will become able to do more.
- Watch for signs that you are doing too much. You are pushing yourself too hard if you cannot talk while you are exercising. If you

become short of breath, nauseated, or dizzy, or if you have chest pain, stop, sit down, and rest. If these symptoms do not go away, call your doctor.

- If you feel "wiped out" the day after you exercise, exercise more slowly or for a shorter time until you can work up to a better pace.
- If your medicines change, ask your doctor whether you should continue your exercise program. New medicines can affect how you feel when you exercise.
- Adjust your exercise program if it is interrupted for more than a couple of days. Gradually increase to your regular activity level.
- Talk to your doctor or a certified fitness professional about your progress. He or she may be able to help if you have problems.

Take these safety measures:

- Do not exercise outdoors when it is very cold, very hot, or very humid. When the weather is bad, exercise indoors or walk at a mall.
- Learn about the risks of any new exercise you start. Use proper form. Take lessons if you need to.
- Avoid holding your breath when doing exercises such as push-ups and sit-ups. Also avoid heavy lifting.
- Do not take hot or cold showers or sauna baths right after you exercise. Very hot or very cold temperatures can be dangerous.
- Do not exercise during times when your disease is not under control unless your doctor has told you it is okay.