

Who Needs a Stress Test Before Exercising?

Starting an exercise program? Afraid to start without having your heart checked out first? Here are the latest recommendations on who needs a stress test before you begin.

What are the heart related risks of exercise?

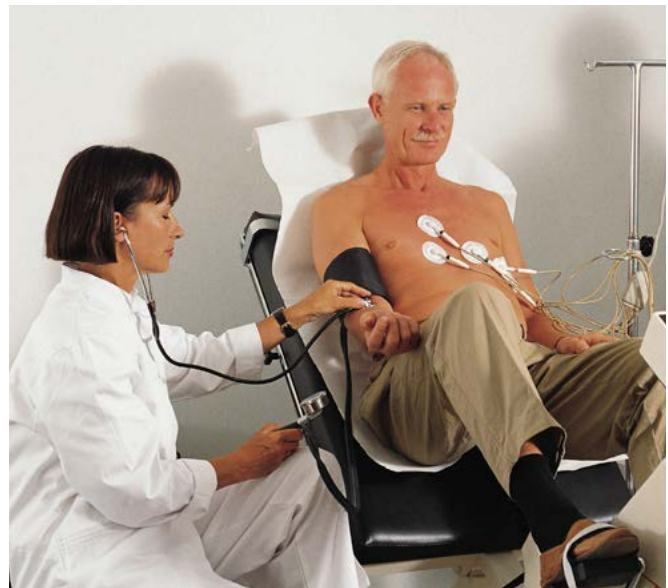
Research has established that the health benefits of exercise far outweigh the risks. While regular exercise reduces your risk of heart attack, diabetes and some forms of cancer, the risk of heart attack and sudden death increases during exercise bouts, although these events are rare. According to one large study, the risk of sudden death during moderate-to-vigorous exercise is 1 death over 1.5 million hours of exercise in men and 1 death over 36 million hours of exercise in women. Most episodes of sudden death in young athletes less than 35 years old are not a result of a heart attack, but rather due to underlying structural heart abnormalities, and exercise recommendations for those with these abnormalities are varied and beyond the scope of this discussion.

The risk of a heart attack during exercise is more common in people more than 35 years old. The greatest risk occurs in sedentary people who decide to perform a vigorous activity, such as shoveling heavy snow. Try to avoid being that person and decrease your risk of a heart attack by exercising regularly. Regular exercise can reduce the risk of heart attack by 50 percent by helping your body and heart adapt to the repeated stresses of physical activity.

Should I have a stress test done just to be safe?

In the past, it was recommended that adults who were planning to start an exercise program for health reasons first visit a health care provider and have a stress test done. For many people, this testing was unnecessary and expensive.

Now, the US Preventive Service Task Force recommends against routine electrocardiogram (ECG) stress testing for people at low risk of cardiac events. Stress testing is unnecessary for the vast majority of people who are looking to start a light-to-moderate exercise program and are planning to increase their exercise appropriately and



gradually. However, it is appropriate to consult with a health care provider if you:

- Do have concerning symptoms at rest or during exercise
- Do have certain medical conditions and want to start a vigorous exercise program

What are concerning symptoms at rest or during exercise that would increase my risk of having a heart attack with exercise?

- Chest pain or pressure
- Neck, jaw or arm pain
- Shortness of breath
- Unusual fatigue
- Heart palpitations
- Dizziness or a feeling like you are going to faint
- Ankle swelling or overnight shortness of breath

If you have any of these symptoms, you should consult your doctor for evaluation prior to beginning an exercise program. This evaluation may or may not include a recommendation for stress testing.

What medical conditions could increase my risk of a heart attack with exercise?

Do you have known cardiovascular disease, diabetes or kidney disease? Talk with your doctor and remember to ask specifically about an exercise prescription. Based on your conditions, or if your known disease condition has been changing over time, your doctor may first recommend you have a stress test before starting an exercise program. Consult with your doctor at least once a year if you have one of these health conditions.

What if I do not have any of these symptoms or medical conditions?

If you do not have any of the symptoms or medical conditions listed above, congratulations! You may start exercising at a light-to-moderate intensity (slight increase in heart rate and breathing) without first seeking medical clearance. And, you may increase that exercise program gradually as long as you do not develop any of the symptoms listed above. By participating in a routine exercise program you are



decreasing your overall heart attack risk. Most exercise-related heart attacks are preceded by some warning signs. Don't ignore it if you develop any of the symptoms described above.

Most people can start a light-to-moderate activity program without a stress test first. What about a more vigorous program? If you are already a regular exerciser you can go ahead and gradually increase your intensity

and volume without additional clearance as long as you still do not develop concerning symptoms. A reasonable warm-up and cool down are recommended. Don't be scared by exercise!

Reference:

Riebe D, Franklin BA, Thompson PD, et al. Updating ACSM's recommendations for Exercise Preparticipation Health Screening. *Med Sci Sports Exerc.* 2015 Nov;47(11):2473-9. doi: 10.1249/MSS.0000000000000664.

Staying Active Pays Off!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that moderate physical activity—such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking—significantly contributes to a longer life. Even a person with health risk factors like high blood pressure, depression, diabetes or a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can also help you achieve weight loss goals. What's more, regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones. Exercise helps improve your mental well-being too.

A Complete Physical Activity Program

Regular physical activity provides many health benefits. While it's not required, working with an exercise professional can help you reach your fitness goals, tailor exercises to your abilities and most importantly, minimize your risk of injury. You should expect the exercise professional to ask you to fill out an exercise preparticipation health screening. This form will ask if you exercise regularly and if you have any health concerns that should prompt you to see your healthcare provider before getting started. The following precautions will help you safely participate in exercise programs:

If you DO NOT exercise regularly:

[If you have not been diagnosed by a doctor with, AND do not have signs or symptoms of cardiovascular, metabolic or kidney disease](#), THEN you can start right away with light to moderate intensity exercise. You can gradually build up to vigorous exercise if you stay free of any symptoms of health problems.

If you have ever been diagnosed by a doctor, with OR have signs/symptoms of cardiovascular, metabolic or kidney disease, THEN it is recommended to seek medical clearance before beginning an exercise program. Once you get medical clearance, you should start with light to moderate intensity. You can gradually build up to vigorous exercise if you stay free of any symptoms of health problems.

If you DO exercise regularly:

If you have not been diagnosed with, AND do not have signs or symptoms of cardiovascular, metabolic, or kidney disease, you can continue with moderate exercise or gradually build to vigorous exercise intensity.

If you have been diagnosed with cardiovascular, metabolic, or kidney disease AND do not have any sign/symptoms of health problems, then you can continue exercising at a moderate intensity. If you received medical clearance within the last 12 months AND your symptoms have not changed, then you can continue with moderate exercise or gradually build to vigorous exercise intensity.

If at any time you develop a sign or symptom of cardiovascular, metabolic or kidney disease, discontinue exercise and seek a doctor's clearance right away. Then, after getting medical clearance, you may continue your moderate intensity exercise program and gradually progress your effort.

Getting Started with an Exercise Program

A well-rounded exercise program includes aerobic, strength training exercises, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve overall health and function. So, it is important to choose exercises you enjoy and can fit into your schedule.

Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone. Activities should be carried out at an effort level that is comfortable for you. You should stop participation in any exercise activity that causes pain. In such event, you should consult with your health care professional immediately.

ACSM recommends you accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) most days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation.

Examples of typical aerobic exercises are: walking, running, stair climbing, cycling, rowing, cross country skiing and swimming. Examples of common strength training exercises are: weight machines, free weights and resistance bands. Flexibility exercises can include: stretches of muscles around different joints and yoga.

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