

Being Active when You Have Atrial Fibrillation

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EXERCISE IS
MEDICINE®

Do you want to feel better, move better and sleep better? Experts now say that any physical activity counts towards better health – even just a few minutes!

People with atrial fibrillation (AF) who are more fit have fewer of the bad consequences related to their AF. Being active also reduces risk factors that lead to heart attacks, strokes, or more serious heart rhythm problems. Regular physical activity can increase your energy level and stamina, improving your ability to do the daily and fun activities you enjoy.

People with AF can exercise safely and will benefit greatly from medium-intensity physical activity. If you have other conditions such as high blood pressure, chronic heart failure or heart valve disease, ask your health care team for guidance.



Getting Started

Keep It Simple

Sit less and move around more! Walk to the mailbox. Walk the dog. Dance in the kitchen. Take the stairs. Find opportunities to move throughout your day. It all adds up.

Talk with Your Doctor

Check with your health care provider about your medical conditions and whether any drugs you're taking affect physical activity. How well is your heart rate controlled? Would a cardiac rehabilitation program be helpful?

Be Active with a Friend

Do activities you enjoy and find a buddy at home or at work. Those who exercise with a friend tend to stick with it longer than those who go it alone.

Take More Steps

Use a smart phone or activity tracker to measure your progress and stay motivated. Count your daily steps for the first week or two. Gradually build up to 7,000-9,000 steps/day.

Start where you are.
Use what you have.
Do what you can.

To stay safe and injury free:

- Start with light to medium effort.
- Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active. Start low and go slow.
- Warm up and cool down at an easy pace before and after exercise.

Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing. Build up to doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity (like a brisk walk, light cycling or water exercise). You'll improve your heart health and stamina.

What?

Any rhythmic activity

How often?

3-5 days a week.

How hard?

Fairly light to somewhat hard.

How much?

Start with a few minutes. Gradually build up to 20-60 minutes over the day.

Remember: Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20-30 minutes. Be active however and wherever you can. To lose weight, do twice as much activity.

Aerobic Activity Cautions

- Rather than use your heart rate as a guide to determine your exercise level, use the “talk test”; stay just below the pace at which you can carry on a conversation.
- If you feel your heart rate is abnormally high on a given day, if you feel an unusual number of “skipped beats” or if you’re extra tired, it’s best not to exercise. Check with your health care provider.
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after exercise.

Strength Training

Strength training improves your health and muscle control. Plus strength training can make daily activities like lifting laundry baskets or yardwork easier and safer.

What?

Hand weights, resistance bands, weight machines or your own body (for example, kitchen counter push-ups or chair sit-to-stands)

How often?

2-3 days/week
*Rest day in between

How hard?

Start with light effort and build to medium (about 60-80%) over time.

How much?

10-15 reps to start (for each major muscle group). Build up to 2 sets, 8-12 reps of challenging effort.

Remember: Avoid straining or holding your breath when lifting. If you need it, get help from a certified exercise professional. They can teach you the right way to do the exercises.

Other Types of Physical Activity

Aerobic activity and strength training are at the heart of a program for those with atrial fibrillation. But you may enjoy and benefit from these other options.

Just for Fun

Find ways of being active that are just plain fun. Try pickleball. Dance. Tend your garden. Play outdoors with your kids or grandkids. Find what makes you smile and do it often.

Yoga, Tai Chi and Pilates

All promote balance, flexibility and strength, and are relaxing too!

Flexibility Exercises

Stretch key muscle groups for 10-30 seconds (30-60 seconds for older adults), 2-7 days/ week to improve flexibility and movement.

Balance Training

Balance exercises can help prevent falls. Try standing on one foot, walking on a line or using a balance board. Train in an uncluttered area and use a chair or wall for support.

More Help

Go to www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro to find an ACSM certified exercise professional near you.

How will I get started **this week?** _____

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.