

Being Active When You Have Heart Failure



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

If you have heart failure, being active will increase your ability to walk farther without stopping (and faster too). You'll lower your risk of having to go to the emergency room for heart failure-related problems such as breathlessness, swelling and overall weakness.



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 be active throughout your day. It all adds up.

Talk with Your Doctor

Talk to your health care provider about joining a cardiac rehabilitation program. Exercise professionals can help design the best activity plan for you and help you stay active on your own.

Be Active with a Friend

Do activities you enjoy and find a partner. Those who are active with a friend or family member tend to stick with it longer than those who go it alone.

Motivation

Think of 2 or 3 personally meaningful goals you'd like to achieve through becoming active. For example, you may want to be able to walk without feeling short of breath or get back to an activity that you haven't done since being diagnosed with heart failure.

Heart Failure Tips and Cautions

When starting an activity program for the first time you may feel short of breath, light-headed or weak. Slow your pace or take frequent breaks. Regular activity will reduce these symptoms.

Keep a daily log of your weight. If you notice that you gain more than 2 pounds in a 24-hour period you may be retaining water in your body. Call your health care professional for guidance.

Many people with heart failure also have high blood pressure which makes the heart work harder than it needs to. Take your prescribed medications.

If you've had a recent stress test, your health care provider can use that information to guide your activity pace. Start with aerobic activity and add strength training after a few weeks.

Although rare, if you experience pain or discomfort with exercise (that is not an emergency), contact your health care provider for guidance.

Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing. Your ultimate goal should be to build up to doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity (like a brisk walking, light biking, dancing or water exercise). When done regularly, you'll improve your stamina and heart health.

What?

Any rhythmic, continuous activity!

How often?

3-5 days/week

How hard?

Comfortable to somewhat hard (can talk but not sing)

How much?

Start w/a few minutes. Gradually build up to 30-60 minutes over the day.

Remember: Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20-30 minutes. Break it up and do 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes at night. Be active however and wherever you can. To lose weight, do twice as much activity.

Aerobic Activity Cautions

- 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
- Avoid exercise in extreme weather (such as hot and humid or bitter cold) because that puts more stress on your heart.

Strength Training

Strength training, for example working with weights or resistance bands, makes you stronger and helps your overall health. Strength training also makes daily activities like lifting laundry baskets or yardwork easier and safer (Start after 4 weeks of aerobic training.)

What?

Hand weights, resistance bands, weight machines or your own body (for example, wall push-ups or chair squats)

How often?

1-2 days/week
*Rest day in between

How hard?

Start with light effort. Gradually build up to medium-hard effort.

How much?

10-15 repetitions (for each major muscle group). Repeat 2 times.

Remember: If you need it, get help from a certified exercise professional. They can teach you the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly.

Strength Training Tips and Cautions

- If you can easily complete 10-15 repetitions, it's time to increase your resistance. The last two repetitions will be harder to do. Stick with it and you'll keep getting stronger.
- Avoid straining or holding your breath when lifting. This may cause you to feel light headed or dizzy.

Other Types of Physical Activity

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

Flexibility

Stretch your muscles 2-3 days/week to the point of feeling tightness. Hold for 10-30 seconds. Repeat 2-4 times. For example, stretch your calves or the back of your thighs.

Yoga, Pilates or Tai Chi

All help with balance, strength and relaxation.

Take more steps!

Use a smart phone or activity tracker. Slowly build to 2,000 more daily steps than you're doing now. Good job! Then aim for 7,000-9,000 steps/ day.

Just for Fun

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

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.**