

Being Active When You Have Heart Valve Disease



Do you want to feel better, move better and sleep better? Experts now say that any physical activity counts toward better health – even just a few minutes! Your heart valves make blood flow through your heart in the right direction. When you have heart valve disease, one or more of the valves doesn't work the way it should. If you need surgery for heart valve disease, getting and staying in good shape beforehand can improve your recovery afterwards.

Regular physical activity:

- Lowers your risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, several kinds of cancer and weight gain
- Helps keep your mind sharp as you get older and reduces your risk of dementia and Alzheimer's
- Increases your energy and slows the effects of aging



The type and intensity of activity that you can do safely depends on many things, including the level and kind of heart valve disease you have. Mild degrees of heart valve disease are common and should not prevent you from starting or continuing an exercise program.

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.

Talk with Your Doctor

Ask your health care provider if you should avoid certain types of exercise. Will any drugs you're taking affect how your body responds? Be sure to ask about blood thinners and your plans for being active.

Be Active with a Friend

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

Motivation

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

Aerobic Activity

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

What?

Any rhythmic, continuous activity

How often?

How often? 3-5 days/week

How hard?

Fairly light to somewhat hard

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. Be active however and wherever you can. To lose weight, do twice as much activity.

Aerobic Activity Caution

- People with certain types and degrees of heart valve disease (such as moderate aortic or mitral stenosis) should avoid high-intensity aerobic exercise. Check with your doctor about the right pace for you.

Strength Training

Strength training can help your muscles work better and increases your strength for daily and recreational activities.

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. Build up to medium effort.

How much?

10 -15 repetitions to start (for each major muscle group). Build up to 8-12 reps. Repeat 2-4 times.

Remember: Avoid straining or holding your breath when lifting. This causes your blood pressure to go up and increases your chance of an abnormal heart rate. A certified exercise professional can teach you the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly.

Strength Training Caution

- If you have moderate or severe mitral regurgitation, avoid high-intensity strength training. If you have moderate or severe aortic stenosis, stick to low-intensity programs. Ask your health care provider if these restrictions apply to you.

To stay safe and injury free:

- Warm up and cool down at an easy pace before and after exercise.
- Start with light to medium effort.
- Be aware of any unusual symptoms and rest if they occur. If you have chest pain or feel light-headed, extremely tired or short of breath, stop immediately and call your health care provider.
- Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active. Start low and go slow!

Other Types of Physical Activity

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

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.

Yoga, Tai Chi and Pilates

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

Just for Fun

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

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.

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

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? _____
