

# Heart-Friendly Exercise Advice

Exercising regularly isn't only good for your waistline — it's also one of the best things you can do for your heart.

## Symptom Checker

Tell Dr. Schueler your symptoms to find out possible causes and treatments. [Get Started](#). A sedentary lifestyle is one of the risk factors for [cardiovascular disease](#), so becoming just a little more active can decrease your heart disease risk and increase your [longevity](#). If you're worried you're too out of shape to get started, don't be. "It's more dangerous to remain sedentary than to start an exercise program," says Barry A. Franklin, PhD, director of the cardiac rehabilitation program and exercise laboratories at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Mich.

Don't think, though, that you have to become a marathoner to see such benefits. "Small increases in cardiovascular fitness through [short bouts of exercise](#) can lead to significant improvements in the health of your heart," Franklin says, adding that physically active individuals experience up to a 50 percent reduction in cardiovascular events, such as a heart attack.

But what sort of exercise is best? Experts say you need two types: aerobic exercise and strength training.

## Aerobic Exercise for Heart Health

Although [aerobic exercise](#) can include bicycling, swimming, jogging, and aerobic classes, walking may be one of the best activities. That's because you can do it anywhere, and you need little equipment outside of a good pair of shoes.

Plus, Franklin says, numerous studies have found that walking offers tremendous cardiac benefits. It helps people improve their fitness levels and endurance capacity, and it burns calories to aid in weight loss. Walking can lower your blood pressure, improve your cholesterol levels and your body's ability to handle glucose or sugar, and reduce your risk of diabetes.

Aim to do 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise at least five days a week, or 20 minutes of vigorous activity three times a week. Franklin defines moderate-intensity exercise as the equivalent of a brisk walk, as if you have someplace to go, while vigorous exercise is even faster walking. If you're starting an exercise program, just avoid doing vigorous activity until you've been exercising for a few months. The

same goes for people with existing heart problems: Unless you have your doctor's okay, stick with moderate-intensity regimes.

If 30 minutes sounds too daunting at first, you can get the same benefits by doing three 10-minute bouts each day. For instance, maybe you walk your dog for 10 minutes in the morning, take a 10-minute stroll at lunch, and walk for another 10 minutes after dinner.

Then, schedule some time for strength training, which will complement — but not replace — the aerobic part of your exercise program.

### **Strength Training for Heart Health**

Strength training boosts muscular strength and endurance; helps your body handle blood sugars; reduces [blood pressure](#); and increases lean body mass, which can help prevent weight gain. "As you age, you lose lean body mass and gain fat mass," Franklin says. The upshot? Because you're losing lean body mass, which burns more calories than fat, you gain weight. However, when you do strength training, you maintain lean body mass and prevent weight gain.

Do strength training for your entire body twice a week, completing one set of eight to 12 repetitions for each muscle group. As you progress, increase to two or three sets. If you're not sure where to start, work with a certified personal trainer for one or two sessions, or buy an instructional DVD or book.

Pair your strength training and aerobic activities with a heart-friendly diet and you'll be well on your way to building a stronger, healthier heart.

Caution: If you have been sedentary for awhile, check with your physician before starting any exercise regimen.