



Exercise and the Heart

Heart disease is the largest single cause of death in Australia. Regular daily exercise reduces the risk of heart disease by lowering blood pressure and blood cholesterol and helping weight control. A combination of healthy eating and regular exercise gives even greater protection against heart disease.

Benefits of exercise

Regular exercise provides many health benefits including:

- Lower blood pressure
- Lower blood cholesterol
- Lower risk of heart disease
- Lower risk of or better control of diabetes
- Lower risk of some cancers
- Better weight control
- Stronger and healthier bones, muscles and joints, reducing the risk of injury
- Better posture
- Increased feelings of well-being and relief of stress, anxiety and depression
- More energy
- Better sleep.

Regular physical activity during childhood and adolescence helps prevent the development of high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease later in life.



Important

Get advice from a doctor before starting an exercise program if you:

- Have, or think you have, heart disease
- Have a close relative with heart disease
- Are overweight
- Are a male over 35 years old, or a female over 45 years old and do not exercise
- Have had a stroke
- Have high blood pressure
- Have any medical conditions, past or present, which may interfere with exercising
- Smoke – think about quitting
- Have not exercised regularly for a while
- Are pregnant.

If exercise causes discomfort, makes you breathless, causes pain in the chest or your heart to beat too fast, stop straight away and consult a doctor.

How much exercise?

For adults, the Heart Foundation recommends at least 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity exercise on all or most days of the week.

Moderate-intensity exercise is exercise that involves some effort. It causes a noticeable increase in the rate and depth of breathing, while still being able to talk or whistle comfortably (e.g., brisk walking, cycling or swimming; mowing the lawn, digging in the garden, dancing). Physiotherapists and other trained health and fitness professionals can advise on the various types of exercise (e.g., aerobic, weight bearing, resistance).

For children and adolescents, health authorities recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

Getting started

- It is never too late to start or increase exercising and every little bit helps. Plan your exercise and choose activities that you enjoy and that you will want to and be able to continue.
- Think of exercise as an opportunity to improve health and well being and not as a time-wasting inconvenience.
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can – (e.g., make a habit of using the stairs instead of taking lifts; park your car 10-15 minutes from work or get off the bus two or three stops early and walk the last part).
- Daily exercise need not be in one continuous session. If you have a busy schedule, aim to be active for several 10-15 minute sessions throughout the day – (e.g., 10 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes at lunchtime and 10 minutes after work).

Fitness and weight loss

Regular, vigorous-intensity exercise promotes extra fitness and weight loss and gives extra protection against heart disease. Vigorous exercise increases your pulse rate and causes a significant increase in the depth and rate of breathing (puffing and panting). For the best results, exercise vigorously on three or four days a week, for 30 minutes or more each time.

Note: 'Vigorous' exercise is not routinely recommended for people with heart disease – ask a doctor.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

Self care

- Spend at least 30 minutes a day walking briskly. Go to different places to make it interesting.
- Relax while you walk – let your thoughts wander and breathe deeply.
- Drink plenty of fluid before, during and after exercise. Avoid alcohol and caffeine-containing drinks (e.g., tea, coffee or cola) as these can cause your body to lose fluid.
- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes made for walking or running.
- Warm up and stretch before starting any activity, and cool down with stretching afterwards. This will help avoid muscle cramps, stiffness, aches and pains.
- Do not exercise with injuries or if you feel pain or discomfort – consult a doctor or physiotherapist.
- Exercise at cooler times of the day.
- Make exercise fun – (e.g., exercise with a friend; join a class or a club).
- Reward yourself (in a healthy way) when you have kept to your exercise plan.
- Eat regular healthy meals, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and whole grain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Drink at least two litres (eight glasses) of water every day (unless a doctor has advised not to).
- Don't smoke.
- Limit alcohol consumption.

Related fact cards

- *Alcohol*
- *Exercises for Flexibility*
- *Fat and Cholesterol*
- *High Blood Pressure*
- *Smoking series*
- *Sprains and Strains*
- *Weight and Health*

For more information

The Heart Foundation – Heartline – phone 1300 36 27 87 or website www.heartfoundation.com.au

HealthInsite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

Healthy and Active – website www.healthyactive.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

