



That First Step

General Information

If you have heart disease or other health concerns, talk with your nurse or doctor before starting an exercise program. They may take a health history, perform a physical exam or request a monitored stress test. This information will be used to make sure exercise is safe for you and to develop an exercise prescription.

Exercise Prescription

There are four parts to an exercise prescription. These four things are sometimes known as **F.I.T.T.**

F: Frequency (Number of Times Per Week You Exercise)

- Try to exercise or be physically active on most, and ideally all, days of the week.
- If every day is not possible, work to get in at least 3 days a week. Try to spread out the days you are active (every other day is better than three days in a row).
- Remember—something is better than nothing.

I: Intensity (How Hard You Exercise)

You may need to work with your nurse or doctor to figure out the best way to measure your exercise intensity. A few ways are:

- Target Heart Rate (THR, or pulse)
- The “Talk Test”
- Rated Perceived Exertion (RPE)

More about these 3 ways to measure the intensity of the exercise you do:

- Your nurse or doctor can show you how to count your heart rate (or pulse) and give you a target heart rate to reach during exercise. Your pulse is the number of times your heart beats in one minute. Pulse rates vary from person to person. Your pulse is lower when you are sitting still and gets faster when you exercise. Knowing how to take your pulse can help you evaluate your exercise program. Some medications or conditions can limit how high your heart rate can go. Be sure to check with your nurse or doctor before getting started. If this is the case for you or you have a hard time taking your pulse, there are other ways to figure out if you are working as hard as you need to.
- The “Talk Test” is simple. If you can talk while exercising, the intensity of your activity is considered to be safe and appropriate for improving your health. If you are exercising so hard that you cannot easily talk to the person next to you, this means you are exercising pretty hard. Ask your doctor or nurse if this is safe for you.
- You can also measure how hard you are working using the Rated Perceived Exertion (RPE) Scale shown on the next page.



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Exercise Prescription (Continued)

I: Intensity (Continued)

Rated Perceived Exertion (RPE) Scale

These numbers are used to grade exercise intensity (how hard you are exercising). A rating of 0 would be nothing at all (sitting in a chair) and a 10 would be very, very heavy (how you feel at the end of an exercise stress test on a treadmill). In most cases, you should exercise at a level of 3-4, which is safe and improves your health.

0	0.5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Nothing at All	Just Noticeable	Very Light	Light	Moderate	Somewhat Heavy	Heavy		Very Heavy			Very, Very Heavy

T: Time (How Many Minutes Your Exercise Session Lasts)

- Start with a warm up of 5-10 minutes including stretching and flexibility exercises.
- Whichever activity you choose, begin slowly. Examples include:
 - Running: walk for 5 minutes and then begin with a jogging pace.
 - Tennis: walk around the court a couple of times and swing the racket slowly to warm up shoulders.
- Then do 20-40 minutes of endurance exercise (such as running, walking, swimming, or biking).
- Slowly increase the time (by 5 minutes each week) and intensity, so it gets a little harder each week.
- End with another 5-10 minutes of strengthening, stretching and flexibility exercises.

T: Type (What Kind of Exercise You Do)

- Endurance exercises are sustained continuous exercises which make your heart rate increase. *Examples include walking, biking, jogging, swimming, or cross country skiing.*
- Strength exercises increase the strength in your muscles. *Examples include lifting weights or household items, or using a resistance band.*
- Balance exercises help prevent falls. *Examples include standing on one foot or tai chi.*
- Flexibility exercises help your body stay limber so you can do your normal activities and not get injured. *Examples include yoga or stretching.*



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Getting Started

- Your nurse or doctor can help you find out whether or not you need to do a stress test before you start being more active. This is very important if you have not been active for some time or if you have health problems.
- Pick an activity that you like to do. Be realistic given where you live and what your body can do! Try to choose more than one activity to prevent boredom and to have a plan for bad weather days.
- Examples of activities that may help your heart health include: walking, jogging, swimming, bicycling, rowing, tennis, and dancing.
- Find a friend who likes to do the same activity that you do! This will help you stay on track with your activity program.
- Stretch only after you are warmed up (unless your doctor or nurse says you should stretch before due to a previous injury or chronic condition). Stretching cold muscles could injure them.
- Start slowly and increase your time to your daily / weekly goal.
- Start with 10 minutes a day of light to moderate activities. Try to add 3-5 minutes to your daily exercise each week. Continue to add time this way until you are able to exercise for 30 minutes. At 30 minutes, you may also wish to increase how hard you are working (known as exercise intensity).

Kinds of exercise I can do and would like to do:

How much physical activity should I get?

Ask your nurse or doctor how much is right for you, especially if you have heart disease or other health concerns. The goal for most adults is 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week.

You may also choose to count steps per day using a pedometer to monitor your progress. A good way to start with a pedometer is to wear it every day for a week so you can get an idea about the average number of steps you are now taking every day. Then you can make a plan to increase this a little every week. So if you find out that you are taking about 3,000 steps a day, set a goal of 3,500 steps a day for the first week. Aim for 4,000 steps a day the next week. You will soon be up to 10,000 steps, or about 5 miles!

My activity goal is _____ minutes per day _____ days of the week.

