



Pick Your Path to Health

Exercise for People with Medical Conditions

You work hard to keep your doctor's visits. You take your medicine on time every time. And you know what you can and can't do. But did you know that, even with a chronic illness, you can and should exercise regularly?

Believe it or not, a program of regular exercise, modified to fit your particular condition or disease, can make you feel better and help improve your health whether you have diabetes, asthma, obesity, or cardiovascular disease, or other diseases.

"If I keep moving, I feel better," says Mary Lu, an office manager for a law firm who suffers from arthritis and restless leg syndrome. "The arthritis hurts, sure, but as long as I exercise five or six times a week, and get up frequently from my desk at work, I'm not so stiff and sore. It also helps me mentally—doing things I enjoy, such as tennis, working with weights, and hiking."

If you think this sounds impossible, check with your doctor. He or she will probably be pleased that you want to exercise (or increase the amount you are exercising) and can give you guidelines and suggestions on what you can try. Then figure out what you would like to do and can do **regularly**—the key to any successful exercise program. Start slowly and build up gradually—overdoing any activity at the beginning has doomed more exercise programs than French fries.

And if feeling better, looking better, and having more energy isn't motivation enough to start you exercising, remember that your family wants you around as long as possible.

Diabetes

Diabetes can be controlled with medication, diet, and exercise. Research has shown that people at risk for developing type 2 diabetes—the most common type of diabetes—reduced their risk by 58 percent through diet and exercise (30 minutes a day, usually walking). These people even improved more than the individuals who took medicine only.

- The American Diabetes Association says that exercise helps pep up insulin's action. (If you take insulin, ask your physician how exercise will affect your levels and what to watch for.)

Obesity

One of the things that puts you at risk for diabetes is obesity—it is also a risk factor for high blood pressure and hypertension. But even gentle exercise—beginning with walking five minutes a day if you haven't been active at all—can help you control your weight and feel better.

Start your exercise program by setting goals that are:

- Specific
- Attainable and
- Forgiving (less than perfect).

A goal of walking five to 10 minutes five times a week meets all those goals, especially forgiving, which allows room for something that might prevent you from walking on a particular day.

And exercise doesn't have to be walking—it can include household chores or moving to music. If you have trouble standing or walking for any period of time, go to NIDDK's "Active at Any Size" Web site at <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/activeatanysize/active.html> to get tips on non-weight bearing exercise such as dancing while seated (moving arms and legs), swimming, working out on a machine, or even lifting small weights like two soup cans while sitting. Again, if you haven't exercised in a while, have other health problems, or have arthritis or another injury, see your doctor first.

Asthma

You may wonder how you could possibly exercise if you have problems breathing from excess weight or asthma. Yet, doctors know now that people with asthma can exercise and that physical activity may improve their asthma.

If your doctor supports your decision to exercise and instructs you on how to use your medication while exercising, these simple steps may help you avoid coughing or shortness of breath.

- Warm up for 10 minutes with light activity.
- Avoid exercising in cold, dry weather. If you do exercise outdoors during the winter, wear a scarf or breathing mask to warm the air you breathe. Also, avoid exercising outdoors when the air is polluted or has a high pollen rate.

- If steady exercise such as jogging or biking brings on asthma symptoms, try an activity that only requires short bursts of activity such as tennis.
- Cool down gradually for 10 to 15 minutes after exercising.

Hypertension (high blood pressure)

Most doctors recommend that if you have high blood pressure you should slowly change your lifestyle to include regular exercise, along with diet changes and weight loss. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) recommends that even low to moderate-intensity activity, if done regularly, can help control and prevent high blood pressure. They recommend walking for pleasure, gardening, yard work, moderate to heavy housework, dancing, and home exercise.

Heart Disease

Even women who have suffered from cardiovascular disease and have experienced a heart attack can exercise. The American Heart Association's (AHA) guidelines for helping people recover from heart attacks recommend exercise training. They point out that even people who were inactive and then started to exercise significantly reduced their risk of dying from heart disease compared to those people who remained inactive.

Dealing with a chronic illness is no picnic. But through a modest exercise program, you can keep yourself and your family on the path to better health.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."