

# Exercise & Activity

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## How Much Do We Need?

The recommendation by health professionals is 30 min per day at least 3 X a week. While there are benefits from as little as 15 min per day, you will need 30 to 60 min, 5 to 6 days per week for optimal health. Remember gardening, wood chopping, raking leaves, brisk walking to the mail, all count as exercise. Exercise can be done in small batches or longer sessions, like a weekend hike or bike ride. But there can also be health risks to sitting all week, then jogging for 4 hours on the weekend. Be careful and consult a fitness professional or your doctor.

Intensity (or how hard your exercise) is also important. If you dawdle along on your walk, you will need to go a lot farther to receive benefit than if you went faster and got your heart rate, within moderation of course. Do not run as fast as you can until exhausted, just so you can speed things up. In fact, any activity that causes panting or heavy breathing can adversely affect your digestive system, kidneys, liver, and circulatory system, even causing heart attacks<sup>2</sup>. Never exercise past your target heart rate for an extended period of time.

Cardiac reserve, the measurement of the heart to work between the resting heart rate up to maximum output, varies in different individuals. The average is 4x, while an athlete can be up to 7x, and a person with a heart condition can have little or no reserve.<sup>3</sup> This is why it is especially important to check with your doctor on what your maximum heart rate (MHR) and target heart rate (THR) is if you have any medical conditions.

## Benefits of Exercise

Exercise has so many benefits, listing them would take a few pages, but here is just a sample of what it can do for your health in general:

- Improves circulation <sup>5</sup>
- Strengthens the bones <sup>6</sup>
- Improves HDL (good cholesterol)<sup>7</sup>
- Strengthens the heart<sup>7</sup>
- Boosts energy levels <sup>8</sup>
- Stimulates the immune system <sup>9</sup>
- Reduces stress & tension <sup>10</sup>
- Improves concentration <sup>11</sup>
- Helps relieve depression <sup>12</sup>
- Improves overall health <sup>13</sup>

## What Kind is Good?

There are many forms of exercise that benefit your health. Walking is one of the best forms of exercise because it is easy to do, can be done any where, can be done outside in the fresh air and sunshine, and it is adjustable to meet different fitness levels. Hills, flats, quicker, carry weight, all can be used to adapt to your needs.

Gardening is another great way to get all the benefits of exercise as is shoveling snow, cross-country skiing, throwing hay bales, and so on. In fact, studies in Sweden have shown exercise combined with sunshine double the

mitochondria, your cellular power plants, in about 28 weeks<sup>14</sup> while studies in Germany show a double in the rate of increasing strength.<sup>16</sup> Swimming is good exercise for those who have joint pain. And the list goes on.

A well balanced exercise plan includes: moderate aerobics, strength training, and stretching.<sup>11</sup> A basic outline is:

5 minutes stretching,

5-10 minutes of warm up, you should be able to sing.

20-30 minutes of aerobic workout, preferably Intermittent Training (see below). You should be able to talk, but not sing.<sup>12</sup> If you are panting, then you are working too hard which is no longer healthy.<sup>13</sup>

10-15 minutes of cool down. Don't stop abruptly as this is hard on the heart.

Lastly 5 minutes of stretching.

Do strength training 1-3 times per week in between IT or aerobic exercise. Advice varies. And don't forget if shoveling snow, pitching hay, or gardening is part of your routine you are combining your strength and aerobic workout, which some call a form of cross training.

## I.T. Overview

One training plan, developed by Harold C. Mayer, MPH, called PULSE I.T.© uses discontinuous aerobic exercise. It is also called Intermittent Training or I.T. Intermittent Training has been found to help improve thyroid function<sup>14</sup> in addition to all the other health benefits of exercise. It is part of the Depression Recovery Program, by Dr. Nedley (see [www.drnedley.com](http://www.drnedley.com)), as well as STEPFAST, a health education program (see [www.stepfast.com](http://www.stepfast.com)). Basically, I.T. is taking some rest for every minute of exercise. Dr. Nedley explains Intermittent Training in relation to your target heart rate.<sup>15</sup> You will need your resting pulse and age to do the following formula. RHR = Resting Heart Rate; MHR = Maximum Heart Rate; THR = Target Heart Rate; HR = Heart Rate

Your target heart rate is found by:  $(220 - \text{age} - \text{RHR}) \times 0.4 + \text{RHR} = \text{THR}$  Example: 35 year old, with a resting heart rate of 70:  $(220 - 35 - 70) \times 0.4 + 70 = 116 \text{ THR}$ .

Now, add 5 to your THR and exercise until you reach this heart rate. Once you have achieved this rate you "rest" (slow down) until your pulse is THR - 5. So in our previous example, the person will exercise until HR is 121, then 'rest' until the HR is 111. There are machines that let you know when to change the pace.

There are other ways to do I.T. exercise, such as 30 seconds of exercise, 30 seconds of rest. Progressing to 50 seconds of exercise and 10 second of rest.<sup>16</sup> Other methods do 20 seconds of exercise, 10 second of rest, and repeat for 30 to 45 minutes. Still others do several minutes of exercise with several minutes of rest.<sup>17</sup> Simply stated - work, rest, work, rest, etc. Sounds like farming, walking on uneven terrain & gardening. In fact these activities are health benefit producing because in addition to being a form of I.T. exercise they are also outside in the fresh country air.

## Find your Pulse

The basic pulse can be found on your wrist at the base of your thumb, it can be felt by using the pads of two fingers. Light, but firm, pressure should allow you to feel it well. Count your pulse for 10 seconds and times by 6. This will give you your HR. To find your resting heart rate, sit down and relax for 15 to 30 minutes before taking your pulse. Caution... medications, especially beta blockers, can effect the heart rate giving you unreliable results. Talk to your doctor if you are on ANY medication.

## WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE?

Too tired? Exercise is energizing. When you exercise in the morning, you can think clearer and often will have energy well into the evening.

No money? Many exercises are free, and the costs of the others far out weigh the health loss if you don't get out and go.

Not motivated? Look into all the benefits of exercise that you are missing. Get a partner to help keep you motivated.

Bad weather? There is no bad weather, only bad clothing. Dress up, warm up, or workout inside.

No Time? Just a few minutes a day sprinkled in will help your health. There will be plenty of time in a nursing home or the extended care unit, if exercise is not a priority in your life.

## Precautions

While exercise takes effort, it should not be painful. Sore muscles should not continue over 3 days. If chest pain or shortness of breath occurs during exercise, stop, and see your doctor. Water, Water, Water: The very best fluid is water. Sweating happens imperceptibly, so don't wait until you're thirsty. Medical Conditions: There are some conditions which limit exercise. Consult your doctor.

## REFERENCES

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- 8 BC Health Guide, "Healthwise Handbook", from the Ministry of Health.
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- 17 Christian Finn, "Sport Science", [www.sportsci.org](http://www.sportsci.org).

Disclaimer: This handout is intended to offer general information. Some material may not be suited for every reader. Readers are strongly encouraged to consult with a medical doctor before starting any exercise program.