

Exercise and heart failure

Exercise is an excellent way to help manage your heart failure. However, when you have heart failure, sometimes exercise can be difficult. You may feel tired or short of breath. Just do as much as you feel you can do. It is important to exercise regularly, but you need to pace yourself.

Why do we keep encouraging you to exercise?

Exercise will help the muscles in your body get stronger so that your heart will not have to work as hard when you do an activity. With regular exercise, such as walking, you may breathe easier and have more energy.

Before you start an exercise program, talk to your doctor, nurse or kinesiologist about what exercises or activities you may be thinking of doing. Ask whether your medications will have an effect on your exercise.

This handout gives you tips on how to start an exercise program and helps to answer these questions:

- How often should I exercise each week?
- How much exercise can I do each day?
- How do I tell if I am exercising at the right level?
- What kinds of exercise can I do?
- How do I know if I have done too much?

You may also be eligible for a cardiac rehabilitation program where you will learn how to exercise safely.

How often should I exercise each week?

Try to exercise 4 to 7 times a week. There may be days when you feel very tired or not well enough to exercise. It is okay to not exercise on these days.

How much exercise can I do each day?

Start by trying to do a total of 10 to 15 minutes of exercise a day. Gradually work your way up to a total of 30 minutes once you feel stronger.

To do 15 minutes a day and gradually work up to 30 minutes a day you may have to pace yourself. For example:

- Do 2 or 3 sets of 5 minutes for a total of 15 minutes.
- Do 3 sets of 10 minutes for a total of 30 minutes.

Remember to take rests when needed.

How do I tell if I am exercising at the right level?

The Rating of Perceived Exertion or RPE Scale (see page 3) is used to measure how easy or hard you find an activity. The numbers on the scale describe how easy or hard an activity feels to you.

The scale has numbers from 0 to 10. For example, 0 (nothing at all) would be how you feel when you are resting in a chair; 8 to 10 would be how you feel when you have finished an exercise stress test.

Try to reach level 3 to 5 on the RPE Scale when you exercise.

When you use this scale, include any symptoms such as shortness of breath and how tired you feel in your legs and body.

The Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) Scale

- 0 Nothing at all, very easy
- 1 Very slight
- 2 Slight
- 3 Moderate**
- 4 Somewhat hard**
- 5 Hard**
- 6
- 7 Very hard
- 8
- 9 Very, very hard (almost maximal)
- 10 Maximal

**It is important to listen to your body
and work at your own pace!**

What kinds of exercise can I do?

You should do both aerobic and strength training exercises.

Aerobic exercises

Aerobic exercises include activities like walking and cycling.



Strength training or resistance exercises

Strength training or resistance exercises include activities like lifting light weights and stair stepping.



Aerobic and strength training exercises will help make your muscles work better. This will take some of the work away from your heart.

See pages 8 to 11 for more information and examples of aerobic and strength training exercises you can do at home.

Talk to your doctor, nurse or kinesiologist before you start aerobic or strength training exercises.

When will I notice a difference?

It usually takes at least 6 to 8 weeks to notice the benefits of exercise. It is normal to feel discouraged at times. Try and stick with it and exercise as regularly as you can. Exercise is one of the best things you can do for your heart. Talk with your doctor, nurse or kinesiologist if you have any questions.

How do I know if I have done too much?

Slow down if:

- you rate your exercise intensity at 6 or more on the RPE scale (see page 3)
- you cannot talk while exercising
- you have new muscle or joint pain lasting more than 3 days
- you are not able to do your normal daily activities following an exercise session

When should I stop an exercise or activity?

Your body should let you know when you need to slow down or stop.

Stop what you are doing if you have:

- dizziness or a faint feeling
- palpitations or unusual heart beats
- a racing heart
- trouble breathing to the point where you cannot talk
- nausea
- angina
- any other symptoms that make you feel worried

If your symptoms are severe and do not go away within 15 minutes of rest, call 911 or an operator for an ambulance.

What do I do if I feel too tired to exercise?

There may be times when you do not feel up to exercising or need to decrease the amount of time you exercise because of other reasons.

Decrease your regular exercise or activities in half when:

- you feel more tired than usual
- you have other activities planned that may make you feel tired such as family gatherings or social events
- your weight has increased and you need to take extra water pills
- you have another health problem such as a cold or infection
- you have missed your regular exercises for 5 to 7 days – for example, due to bad weather

If you still feel extra tired after doing only half of your regular exercises, talk with your doctor, nurse or kinesiologist.

Are there any activities I should not do?

Do not do these activities until you have cleared them with your doctor:

- Do not lift, carry, push or pull anything over 4.5 kilograms or 10 pounds. This includes children, pets, groceries, laundry and weights.
 - If you have to hold your breath to lift something - it is too heavy for you.
 - Do not shovel.
 - Avoid activities where your arms are kept over your head such as washing windows, painting and hanging decorations. Use long handed tools to make reaching easier.
 - Do not go into a sauna or hot tub. These activities are not recommended for people with heart problems due to extreme heat.
 - Avoid straining or holding your breath such as when straining on the toilet or trying to open a window that is stuck.
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What happens if I do not exercise?

If you do not do regular exercise, the muscles in your body will get weaker over time. This will make you feel even more tired, short of breath or both. It will also put more stress on your heart.

Here are some helpful hints for exercise:

- Plan to exercise at a time when you feel rested, such as after a nap.
 - Schedule exercise time into your daily routine. Exercising at the same time every day may help.
 - Stick with it. If you exercise daily, it will soon become a healthy habit. It often takes only 21 days to start a habit.
 - Even starting off with a very small amount of exercise is good. Use the enclosed **Exercise Record** to help you keep track of your progress.
 - Wear loose, comfortable clothing and comfortable shoes.
 - Always start with a 10-minute warm up to slowly increase your heart rate and stretch your muscles before exercise.
 - Walk on a flat surface. Avoid steep hills and streets.
 - When drinking liquids during exercise, remember to keep within your fluid restriction.
 - Try different exercises so that you do not get bored.
 - Pace yourself and balance your activities with rest.
 - Never exercise on a full stomach. Wait at least 1½ hours after a large meal.
 - Avoid exercising outside in very hot or very cold temperatures.
 - Avoid windy weather.
 - If you become too tired or very short of breath with exercise, do not go to bed for a nap. It is much better for you to rest sitting in a comfortable chair.
 - Include a 5 to 10 minute cool down period at the end of your exercise session. This will help the blood to return back to your heart from your muscles.
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Exercises

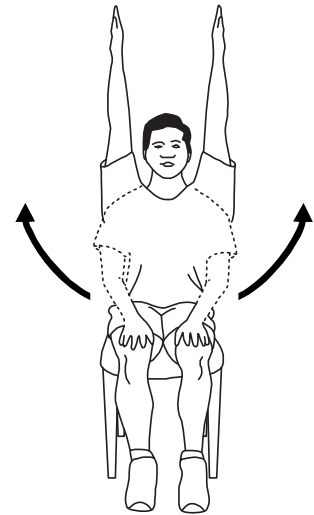
When you exercise, continue to breathe normally. Holding your breath while doing any physical activity can raise your blood pressure and heart rate too quickly. This will put too much stress on your heart and you may feel unwell.

If you have any unusual joint or muscle pain, stop the exercise causing pain. Talk to your doctor, nurse or kinesiologist before starting this exercise again.

You may do these exercises at home to get started ...

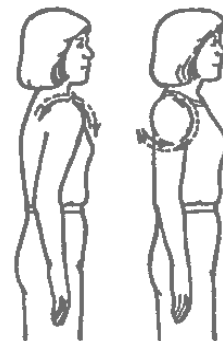
Exercise #1 – Deep breathing

Sit or stand with your arms at your side. Take a deep breath in and bring your arms over your head. As you breathe out, bring your arms back to your sides. Repeat 3 to 5 times.



Exercise #2 – Shoulder circles

Sit or stand with good posture. Slowly rotate shoulders backward. Then rotate shoulders forward. Repeat 5 times each way.



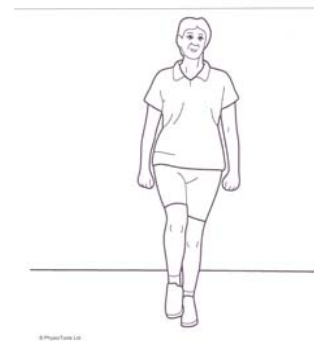
Exercise #3 – Arm circles

Slowly make large circles with your arms. Repeat 5 times forward and 5 times backwards with each arm.



Exercise #4 – March on the spot

With arms at your side, slowly march on the spot for 3 to 5 minutes.



Exercise #5 – Hamstring stretch

To stretch the back of your thigh, sit in a chair with one leg straight in front, heel on the floor. Lean your body forward, sit tall with your head up. Hold the stretch for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each leg. Keep breathing easily.



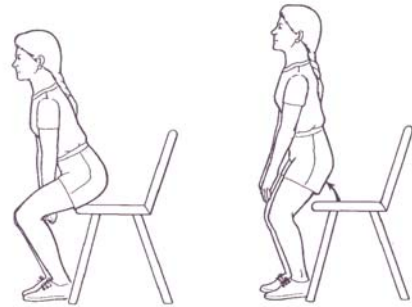
Exercise #6 – Sitting knee extension

Sit on the edge of a bed or chair. Straighten right knee fully. Hold for 5 seconds. Slowly lower to starting position. Repeat 5 to 10 times on each leg.



Exercise #7 – Sit to stand

Sitting with your arms at your side, stand up and then sit down slowly on a chair. Repeat 5 to 10 times.



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Exercise #8 – Step ups

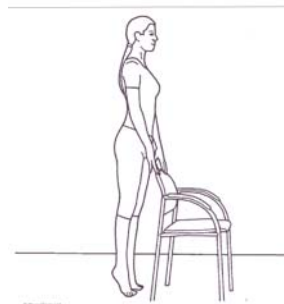
Stand in front of an 8" step. Step up 5 to 10 times with one leg leading. Repeat with the other leg leading.



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Exercise #9 – Calf raises

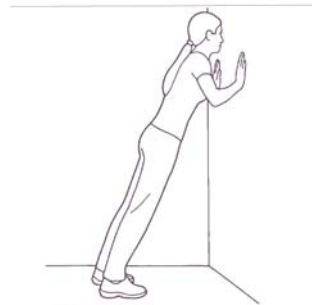
Stand with your hands on the back of a chair for support. Push up on your toes. Repeat 5 to 10 times.



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Exercise #10 – Wall push-ups

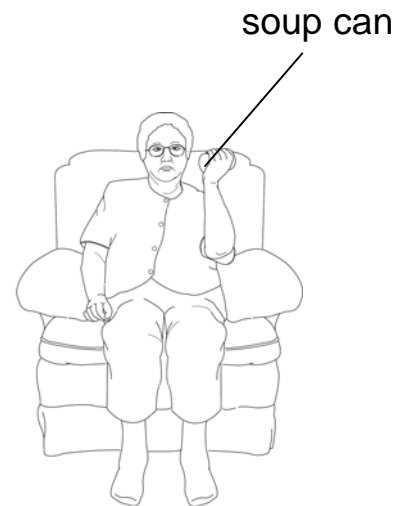
Stand facing a wall with your arms straight and hands on the wall. Slowly bend your elbows, bringing your face and chest towards the wall, then push away from the wall back to your restarting position. Repeat 5 to 10 times.



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Exercise #11 – Bicep curls

Start by using a weight of 1 to 2 pounds ($\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 kg), such as a soup can, when you first begin your program. Using one arm at a time, keep your palm upward and your elbow at your side. Hold the weight in your hand and slowly bend your elbow, bringing your hand toward the ceiling. Slowly return. Repeat 5 to 10 times on each arm.



Pictures for exercises 2 to 10 are used with permission from The Saunders Group Inc.

Cool down

Always cool down by doing some very slow walking or easy marching on the spot for 5 to 10 minutes. Include some deep breathing and arm circles.

Tips to help you start walking ...

- Wear proper walking shoes to avoid muscle and joint problems.
- Start by walking the distance you walked in the hospital.
- Plan your walks and start off slowly - even if you can only walk for 2 to 5 minutes at a time. Often people find it easier to do a few short walks in a day rather than taking one long walk.
- Gradually increase the amount of walking you do.
- Walk with someone the first few times. This will make you and your family feel more confident. It is always a good practice to exercise with someone.
- A shopping mall is a good place to walk. It is climate controlled and the surface is flat. There are often benches along the way to rest.
- A good rule to remember is, "Walk so you can talk". If talking is hard to do, then you need to slow down or rest.

Remember ...

Have fun! Choose an activity that you enjoy and you will be more likely to stick with it.

