



Getting Fit – Frequently Asked Questions – printed from the JustMove.org online exercise program.

Q: What's the leading cause of death in America?

A: Cardiovascular disease. CVD was responsible for about 930,000 deaths in America last year and the leading cause of death for women!

Q: What is one major risk factor for heart disease and other health problems?

A: Physical inactivity. Studies have shown that regular physical activity reduces the risk of heart disease. Regular activity may also reduce the risk of some kinds of embolic strokes.

Q: Can moderate to low-intensity activity bring benefits?

A: Most definitely. When done for as little 30 minutes a day, activities such as pleasure walking, climbing stairs, gardening, yard work, moderate to heavy housework, dancing and home exercise have been shown to be beneficial. Again, doing anything is better than nothing.

Q: What type of activity is best for improving the fitness of your heart and lungs?

A: More vigorous aerobic activities such as brisk walking, running, swimming, bicycling, roller-skating, and jumping rope -- done on most days of the week for 30-60 minutes --are best.

Q: What percentage of American adults gets enough exercise to achieve cardiovascular fitness?

A: Overall 61.4% of adults age 18 and older engage in at least some leisure-time physical activity.

Q: If I exercise, will I prevent heart disease?

A: Physical inactivity, along with cigarette smoking, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol, is one of the major modifiable risk factors for heart attack. There is no guarantee that you will not get heart disease; however, your chances of heart disease developing are less if you avoid the risk factors.

Q: I have been inactive for years. Shouldn't I see a doctor before I start becoming physically active?

A: People middle-aged or older who are inactive and at high risk for heart disease or who already have a medical condition should seek medical advice before they start or significantly increase their physical activity. Most apparently healthy people of any age can safely engage in moderate levels of physical activity (e.g. moderate walking, gardening, yard work) without prior medical consultation.

Q: How much physical activity is enough?

A: If you are inactive, doing anything is better than nothing! Studies show that people who have a low fitness level are much more likely to die early than people who have achieved even a moderate level of fitness. If you want to exceed a moderate level of fitness, you need to exercise three or four times a week for 30 to 60 minutes at 50-80 percent of your maximum capacity.

Q: Is physical activity safe?

A: The potential health benefits of physical activity greatly outweigh the risk, although there is a very slight increased risk of death due to heart attack during vigorous physical activity. Consult your doctor first if you have any concerns, have been sedentary, are overweight, are middle-aged or older or have a medical condition.

Q: Do I need to do vigorous physical activity?

A: To achieve health benefits, no. Doing moderate-level activities often will help lower your health risks. If you want to attain a high level of cardiovascular fitness, you need to gradually work up to exercising at least three or four times a week for 30-60 minutes at 50-80 percent of your maximum capacity.

Q: Does physical activity counteract the harmful effects of other risk factors?

A: Studies show that being physically fit lowers heart disease risk even in people who have other health problems such as high blood pressure, obesity, and high blood cholesterol. To minimize risk, however, you should be physically fit and avoid the other major modifiable risk factors: cigarette smoke, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol.

Q: Do women get the same benefits from physical activity as men?

A: Most studies showing the positive effects of physical activity have been done with men. The few studies that have included women have indicated that women may benefit even more than men from being physically fit. Early indications show the reduced rates of death by heart disease are higher for women who are physically fit than for men.

Women who do not exercise regularly have twice the chance of dying from heart disease than women who do exercise, just as women who smoke double their chances of dying from heart disease than women who don't smoke. Women may live longer than men, but they don't necessarily live better. Elderly women who have not been physically active experience more disability in their daily function than women who have been active.

Q: I am a senior citizen. Is it too late for me to become physically active? Should I take special precautions?

A: More and more seniors are proving every day that they are not too old to become physically active. In fact, the older you are, the more you need regular physical activity. However, there are some special precautions you should take. If you have a family history of heart disease, check with your doctor first. Don't try to do too much too fast. Exercise at an intensity appropriate for you. Pick activities that are fun, that suit your needs and that you can do year-round. Wear comfortable clothing and footwear. Choose a well-lighted, safe place with a smooth, soft surface. Take more time to warm up and cool down before and after your workout. Stretch slowly. Don't rely on your sense of thirst; drink water on a fixed schedule.

Q: As a parent, how can I make sure that my children are physically fit?

A: Set a good example by practicing good heart healthy habits yourself. Limit sedentary activities such as television, movies, videos and computer games to no more than two hours a day. Plan active family outings and vacations. Assign household chores (mowing lawns, raking leaves, scrubbing floors, etc.) that require physical exertion. Observe what sports and activities appeal to your children, then encourage their development with lessons or by joining teams. If it is safe to walk or bike rather than drive, do so. Use stairs instead of elevators and escalators. Make sure that your children's physical activities at school or in daycare are adequate. When your children are bored, suggest something that gets them moving -- play catch or build a snowman!