Exercise: Starting an Exercise Program

Exercise is very important for good health. Your healthcare provider may tell you that you need to get more exercise. To do this, you will need to get into the habit of exercising so that it becomes part of your normal daily or weekly routine. The best exercise for you is one that you enjoy and that you will do on a regular basis. If you start a jogging program, but hate to jog, you are not likely to keep it up. Find an activity you enjoy, perhaps basketball, soccer, dance, or hiking. Try to involve family members or friends. Join a team or an exercise class and make it fun.

You can get exercise at many times of the day. For example, take the stairs instead of an elevator, park far away in a parking lot and walk briskly to the store, or walk during your lunch break. The benefits are lifelong - so have fun and stick to it!

What is aerobic exercise?

An aerobic exercise is any activity that makes your muscles use oxygen. When you are doing an aerobic exercise, your heart has to work harder to get more oxygen to your muscles. This makes your heart stronger. Endurance exercises such as biking, jogging, walking, swimming, or basketball are considered aerobic.

Aerobic exercise:

➢ Decreases your blood pressure, which reduces your risk for having a heart attack or stroke.

➢ Decreases your resting heart rate, which puts less stress on your heart.

➢ Increases the levels of HDL (the good cholesterol in your blood).

➢ Increases your cardiac output, which means your heart pumps more blood with each heartbeat.

➢ Decreases your resting respiratory rate, which means your lungs don't work as hard when you are at rest.

➢ Increases blood flow to your lungs, which helps you to get more oxygen.

➢ Burns calories, which can help you lose weight.

What is anaerobic exercise?

Anaerobic exercise is high intensity, strenuous activity such as weight lifting or sprinting. It is done to build strength, improve speed, and lose body fat.

You have the opportunity to do this kind exercise often during the day. Carrying groceries or sprinting to catch a bus are considered anaerobic exercise.

Interval training is a great anaerobic exercise. An interval can be done with many types of exercise (for example, running, biking, swimming, or weight lifting). An interval is done by increasing your pace for a short period of time (for example, between 10 to 60 seconds) then having a slow recovery period that is at least 3 times as long as the interval. To interval train, you simply repeat these bursts of exercise during the course of your workout. For example, you run for 30 seconds, then walk for 2 minutes, run for 30 seconds, walk for 2 minutes and so on.

One benefit from anaerobic exercise is that it may raise your metabolic rate for nearly 18 hours after the activity is finished. This means you may burn calories at a faster rate well after the exercise is completed. This can help you lose weight. In contrast, aerobic exercise only raises your metabolic rate for 2 hours.

How often and how long should I exercise?

There are three ways to measure your exercise: frequency, duration, and intensity.

➢ **Frequency:** This is how often you exercise. Try to get aerobic exercise at least 3 times a week. Doing too much aerobic exercise can lead to overtraining and overuse injuries. Do anaerobic exercise 2 or 3 times a week.

➢ **Duration:** This is how long you exercise. The goal is to have each exercise workout last 30 to 60 minutes. You may need to work up to this gradually.

➢ **Intensity:** This is how hard you are working when you exercise. While you are doing aerobic exercise, you should keep your heart rate up. To make sure you are benefiting from your exercise, you need to check your heart rate (pulse) during your workout. You need to set a target heart rate for yourself so that you can make sure you are exercising hard enough to help your heart, yet easy enough so you can complete the exercise safely. The goal for aerobic exercise is to maintain your target heart rate during your exercise for at least 20 minutes. You can also use your target heart rate to check your progress over time. For anaerobic exercise, use a heart rate monitor during your rest intervals to monitor recovery. You will do a sprint, rest, then do another sprint once your heart rate enters your recovery zone.

After a few weeks of training, you can continue improving your level of fitness by increasing the frequency, duration, or intensity of your exercise.

How do I calculate my target heart rate?

To figure out your target heart rate, you first need to figure out your maximum heart rate (MHR). Your maximum heart rate is calculated by subtracting your age from 220.

220 - Age = MHR

For example, if you are 40 years old, your MHR would be 180 beats per minute.

220 - 40 (years old) = 180 beats per minute

Next, figure out your target heart rate. Your target heart rate is based on a percentage of your MHR. For aerobic activity, try to keep your heart rate between 50% and 85% of your MHR. For example, if you are 40 years old your target heart rate range should be 90 to 153 beats per minute.

180 (MHR) x 0.5 (50%) = 90 beats per minute

180 (MHR) x 0.85 (85%) = 153 beats per minute

During exercise, check your pulse from time to time to see if you are within your target heart rate range. Do this by finding your pulse on the thumb side of your wrist or on your neck beside your Adam's apple. Use a clock or watch with a secondhand to count the number of heartbeats in 10 seconds. Multiply that number by 6 to get the number of heartbeats per minute. Some exercise machines will measure your heart rate when you put your hands on special sensors. You can also buy a heart rate monitor that you wear.

For aerobic exercise, if your heart rate is too fast (over your 85% mark) then slow down. If your heart rate is below your 50% mark then you need to pick up your pace.

What about warming up and cooling down?

You should include warm-up and cool-down exercises before and after exercise. Muscles that have not been used are cool. Doing calisthenics and dynamic stretching or walking slowly for 5 to 10 minutes before beginning your workout warms your muscles, making them more flexible and less prone to injury.

Right after exercise, allow your heart rate to return slowly to normal. Walking slowly, for example, will let you cool down and let your heart and breathing to return to normal levels. You should also stretch the muscles you used during your exercise. Devote a total of 5 to 10 minutes to cooling down.

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