

The Right Exercise Program for You

WalkingWorks® and the Pedometer Lending Program are great ways to support your efforts to live healthy; however, it is important to find the right exercise program for you to help you stay motivated to achieve your goals.

Find an activity you enjoy and will do on a regular basis — perhaps basketball, soccer, dance, or hiking — stick to it and have fun!

Consider the following questions when you start to plan your exercise program:

What is aerobic exercise?

Aerobic exercise is any activity (like walking, jogging, or biking) 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, which makes your heart stronger.

What is anaerobic exercise?

Anaerobic exercise is high intensity, strenuous activity (like weight lifting or sprinting) to build strength, improve speed, and lose body fat.

Interval training is a great anaerobic exercise. An interval can be done with many types of exercise by increasing your pace for a short period of time and then having a slow recovery period that is at least three times as long as the interval. Repeat these bursts of exercise during the course of your workout.

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 do aerobic exercise at least three times a week, and anaerobic exercise 2–3 times a week. Remember, doing too much can lead to overtraining and injuries.
- **Duration:** This is how long you exercise. The goal is to have each exercise workout last 30–60 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, set a target heart rate for yourself. 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, then rest, then do another sprint once your heart rate enters your recovery zone.

After a few weeks of training, you can continue to improve your level of fitness by increasing the frequency, duration, and/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.

$$220 - \text{Age} = \text{MHR}$$

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

Next, calculate your target heart rate. For aerobic activity, try to keep your heart rate between 50 and 85 percent of your MHR.

For example, if you are 40 years old your target heart rate range should be 90 to 153 beats per minute.

$$180 \text{ (MHR)} \times 0.5 \text{ (50\%)} = 90 \text{ beats per minute}$$

$$180 \text{ (MHR)} \times 0.85 \text{ (85\%)} = 153 \text{ beats per minute}$$

During exercise, check your pulse periodically to see if you are within your target range. You can best measure your pulse on the thumb side of your wrist or on your neck, just below your jaw line. Use a clock or watch with a secondhand to count the number of heartbeats in 10 seconds. Multiply that number by six to get the number of heart beats 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 to 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 can 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 5–10 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 help you cool down and let your heart and breathing to return to normal levels at a healthy pace. You should also stretch the muscles you used during your exercise. Devote a total of 5–10 minutes to cooling down.

Converting Minutes to Steps

To convert your walking time from minutes to steps, multiply the minutes you walked by 133 steps. For example:

15 minute walk \times 133 steps/minute = 1,995 steps (approximately one mile)

For other exercises, find the activity that most closely matches yours on the table below and multiply your activity minutes by the appropriate number in the “Steps per One Minute of Activity” column.

For example:

30 minutes gardening \times 89 steps/minute = 2,670 steps

The Office of the Surgeon General recommends striving for at least 30 minutes of physical activity on all, or most, days of the week.