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Exercise and Fitness

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What are the benefits of exercise?

Regular exercise can provide the following health benefits:

- Reduce the risk of heart disease by strengthening your heart, lowering cholesterol, and decreasing blood pressure
- Decrease the risk of diabetes and certain types of cancer
- Increase your flexibility
- Give you more energy
- Strengthen your muscles
- Help control your weight
- Build and maintain strong bones
- Relieve stress
- Help you sleep better
- May help with depression and anxiety

What are the types of exercise?

There are two types of exercises—***cardiovascular*** (or aerobic) ***exercise*** and strength training. A mix of both is best.In addition to these exercises, every workout should include exercises to promote flexibility. This means careful stretching of the muscles and joints. Some exercise programs, such as Pilates and yoga, are specifically designed to improve flexibility.All strength training and some cardiovascular exercise is weight bearing. This means that, during exercise, your body is supporting your weight against gravity. This promotes bone density and protects against osteoporosis.

What does cardiovascular exercise do?

Cardiovascular exercise causes your heart and lungs to work harder to build fitness. Improving the fitness of your heart and lungs increases your body's ability to use oxygen. Also, it burns ***calories***, which helps you lose weight.

Cardiovascular exercise also helps build endurance. The more endurance you have, the longer you can exercise.

Examples of cardiovascular exercise are:

- Swimming
- Running
- Bicycling
- Walking
- Cross-country skiing
- Aerobic activities

What does strength training do?

Strength training, also called resistance training, builds muscle and slows bone loss. Exerting force on your muscles and bones helps to strengthen them. As you build muscle, your body will become more toned. The more muscle you have, the better your body burns calories. Examples of strength training include:

- Lifting weights
- Using weight machines
- Using resistance bands
- Push - ups
- Leg lifts
- Squats
- Sit -ups

How often and how much should I exercise?

- To decrease the risk of chronic disease—exercise at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- To maintain weight—exercise about 60 minutes on most days of the week. You should not eat more calories than you burn.
- To lose weight—exercise at least 60–90 minutes on most days of the week. You will likely have to reduce the number of calories you eat.

How do I begin an exercise routine?

If you are in good health, you do not have to see your health care provider before you begin a moderate exercise program. However, some people may need extra care. You should talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise program if

- you are older than 50 years and plan a vigorous program
- you have a chronic medical condition or are at increased risk of a medical condition

- you are very overweight (obese)
- you are pregnant

If it has been some time since you have exercised regularly, you should start exercising slowly and gradually. You can spread exercise throughout the day. Plan your exercise program to suit your interests and lifestyle.

Why should I warm up and cool down before and after exercising?

Warm-up exercises prepare your heart and muscles for more intense activity and prevent injuries. Cooling down helps your body return to normal after exercise.

Start the exercise session with a warm-up period for 5–10 minutes. This is light activity, such as slow walking or stationary cycling at a low resistance.

After exercising, cool down by slowly reducing your activity. This allows your heart rate to return to near-normal levels. Cooling down for 5–10 minutes and stretching will increase flexibility and prevent muscle soreness.

How do I know when I am working out too hard?

The following signs indicate that you may be working too hard:

- Excessive muscle soreness or pain
- Problems breathing
- Feeling very tired for the whole workout
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Faintness
- Dizziness
- Irregular heartbeat

If any of these signs occur, you should stop working out. The next time you exercise, do not work quite so hard. If you still have problems, see your health care provider.

How can injuries from exercise occur?

Women who routinely exercise too much may get injuries because of repeated stress on their muscles and bones. These injuries include stress fractures, shin splints (which cause pain at the lower front part of the leg), and knee injuries. Exercises that can cause stress injuries include high–impact aerobics and running.

How can I avoid injury during exercise?

One way to avoid injury is to rest on some days or alternate between vigorous and lighter activity. Another way is to cross- train, which means doing different activities, such as tennis and swimming. Water-based activities, such as swimming or water aerobics, are low–impact exercises that are ideal for older women. Water aerobics, however, is not a weight-bearing exercise and will not help prevent osteoporosis.

Glossary

Calorie: A unit of heat used to express the fuel or energy value of food.

Cardiovascular Exercise: Exercise designed to promote a healthy heart and blood vessels.

If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.