



STARTING TO EXERCISE FOR A HEALTHY HEART

Patient Information

If you are recovering from heart surgery or a heart attack, your doctor may have prescribed a daily graduated walking program to help your recovery. This program is also good if you have not exercised in a long time, and your doctor recommends walking to help control your blood pressure or reduce your chances of cardiovascular disease.

Daily exercise may be one of the best gifts you can give yourself. It improves circulation, lowers blood pressure, helps in a weight control program, and strengthens your muscles. It can also help you sleep better, feel more energetic, and increase your sense of well-being.

General Guidelines

1. If you are recovering from heart surgery or a heart attack, have someone with you for the first several weeks.
2. Wait at least 2 hours after eating.
3. Wear comfortable rubber-soled walking shoes and loose clothing.
4. Avoid extreme heat or cold. Do not exercise if the temperature is over 85° F (particularly if the humidity is over 75%) or under 20° F. During bad weather, walk in a covered shopping mall or gym.
5. Always begin with a 5-minute warm-up of stretching and slow walking.
6. Adopt a steady, rhythmic pace and keep it up. If you have attacks of leg cramps (claudication), you may need to alternate walking with rest periods.
7. Watch for signs of overexertion. Stop walking if any of these symptoms occurs: chest pain (angina), palpitations, irregular heartbeat, dizziness or light-headedness, shortness of breath for more than 10 minutes, nausea or vomiting, extreme fatigue, pale or splotchy skin, or "cold sweat." Call your doctor if these symptoms persist.
8. Cool down with light activity for 5 minutes; for example, if you are walking fast, slow down to a stroll.

Graduated Walking Program

Graduated walking programs are designed to slowly increase the time, distance, and walking pace. Because they begin very slowly, you may be tempted to skip ahead if you feel the schedule is "too easy." Don't. The graduated schedule allows your heart time to adjust to increasing amounts of work. Skipping ahead may overwork your heart.

Carry out the program just as your doctor orders. If you develop symptoms of overexertion, return to the previous week's schedule until you are ready to progress.

You must know the exact distance to determine how fast you should walk. You can measure the distance on your car odometer. If you find you walk the distance in less time than the schedule specifies, slow your pace down next time. If it takes longer, you need to walk a little faster.

As soon as you stop walking, take your pulse. Your heart rate should not exceed the upper limit of the target heart rate set by your doctor. For many people, this is less than 115 beats per minute.

First 9 Weeks		
Week	Walking Time	Distance
1	5 minutes	1/4 mile
2	5 minutes	1/4 mile
3	10 minutes	1/2 mile
4	10 minutes	1/2 mile
5	15 minutes	3/4 mile
6	15 minutes	3/4 mile
7	20 minutes	1 mile
8	20 minutes	1 1/2 miles
9	30 minutes	2 miles

At this point, you are ready to extend your walking time. Because the exercise will be sustained for a longer time, your pace will need to be a little slower the first few weeks. By week 12, your walking speed will increase to a brisk walk.

Weeks 10 - 12		
Week	Walking Time	Distance
10	40 minutes	2 miles
11	40 minutes	2 miles
12	60 minutes	3 miles

You must continue with an exercise program after week 12. You should continue your walking program, join a medically supervised walk-jog program, or add another form of exercise to your program such as bicycling. Follow your doctor's advice about the best program for you.