

Otherwise, even people with moderate to severe heart disease can safely exercise to build endurance and promote recovery with guidance from a doctor. Supervised aerobics and strength training, in fact, are mainstays of rehabilitation after a heart attack.

“I’M TOO TIRED FOR EXERCISE.”

Expending energy to increase energy might seem like a contradiction. But dozens of clinical trials have found that starting a regular exercise routine can combat feelings of exhaustion, even among people suffering from chronic conditions associated with fatigue, like cancer, fibromyalgia, and multiple sclerosis.

Aerobic activity helps rev up your metabolism, elevate your mood, and improve your sex life. It can also help you to sleep more soundly. And strength training can make it easier to do everyday tasks, such as climbing stairs, lugging groceries, and weeding a garden.

It doesn’t take much exercise to make a significant difference. In a small trial of sedentary and continuously fatigued young adults, researchers found that just 20 minutes of light or moderate cycling three times a week was enough to boost their energy levels by an average of 20 percent compared with participants who didn’t exercise.

“I’M NOT OVERWEIGHT. WHAT’S THE POINT?”

Sedentary living can make you more vulnerable to cancer, heart disease, osteoporosis, type 2 diabetes, and premature death, even if you’re lean. As a risk factor for heart disease, inactivity ranks about as high as smoking. In a study that tracked 2,603 men and women age 60 or older for about 12 years, normal-weight people who were unfit were more likely to die than obese volunteers who exercised enough to maintain aerobic fitness.

Exercise works in many ways to boost health and life span. Aerobic training and resistance

Tips to boost your success

Keep it simple. The more complicated an exercise program, the less likely novice exercisers are to stay with it.

Don’t overdo it. Exhaustion or extreme soreness will make exercise seem like punishment, not the rewarding experience it can be.

Make it social. Round up exercise partners or join a club devoted to cycling, dancing, hiking, or another activity that interests you.

Set goals. Be specific about what type of exercise you’re going to do, for how long, and how often. Note how fast you can walk a mile or how many push-ups you can do, then aim for improvements. Reward yourself for success.

Enlist support. Explain your goals to family and close friends so they can provide encouragement.

Have fun. If you find regular exercise dull, perhaps try something new—like hula hooping or Frisbee golf.

exercise improve the body’s ability to manage blood sugar, which helps control diabetes. Exercise can lower blood pressure, in part by keeping artery walls supple, and weight-bearing exercise builds bones to help them resist osteoporosis. Strength training can halt the breakdown of muscles and tendons once considered an inevitable part of aging, and restore muscle power to levels you had earlier. Regularly challenging your muscles could spur changes at the cellular level that slow or even reverse some of the root causes of aging.

“IT’S TOO PAINFUL.”

About half of very old adults cite musculoskeletal discomfort or disability as a reason for not exercising. But exercise doesn’t have to be overly ambitious to build aerobic fitness and muscle strength. Walking briskly is sufficient for most people to reach the moderate level of intensity recommended by fitness experts, as are playing golf, mowing a lawn, and biking at a leisurely pace.

To trigger significant muscle growth, you only need to work muscles at 60 percent of their maximum capability. For most people, that means using a weight you can lift about 15 times. Working at higher intensities—using a weight that can be lifted only 8-12 times—offered no additional benefits in a British study of 50 men.

If joint pain is an issue, water aerobics can lighten the load and make it possible to move in ways that otherwise might be too painful.

Some medical centers offer exercise programs specifically for people with arthritis or other chronic pain problems. In a clinical trial that looked at a yoga program for people with the disabling disorder fibromyalgia, volunteers not only managed to exercise but also showed significant improvement in measures of pain, fatigue, stiffness, sleep, depression, and anxiety. ■



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