

## The Health Benefits of Fitness – Exercise is Medicine

### Tips to Help Keep Your Health On Track!

This is the second article in a series on the health benefits of fitness: Exercise is Medicine, Improve Your Balance, Strength Training, High Intensity Training, and Wearable Technology. This article will provide you with general information about how exercise can help you maintain your overall health, especially if you have a chronic disease. <sup>(1)</sup>

Fitness and Chronic Disease	Health Precautions	Exercise Safely	Exercise Intensity	Stay Motivated
<p>Exercise is a very important step you can take to become and stay healthy. It can be especially beneficial if you have a chronic illness.</p> <p>If you suffer from a chronic condition, such as diabetes, heart disease, back or joint pain, or asthma, don't rule out exercise, as you may benefit from it.</p> <p><b>Diabetes-</b> Exercise helps insulin more effectively lower blood sugar level, manage weight, and keep energy level elevated.</p> <p><b>Heart disease-</b> Exercising helps with heart health, stamina, and management of weight.</p> <p><b>Back or joint pain-</b> Exercising helps increase back strength, reduce aches and pains, ease joint stiffness, and improve overall muscle strength and flexibility.</p> <p><b>Asthma-</b> Exercise helps to control the frequency and severity of asthma attacks.</p> <p>Talk to your doctor to see if an exercise program is right for you.</p>	<p>If it's been awhile since you've exercised, start out slowly, especially if you have a chronic health issue.</p> <p>Some conditions require health precautions, so have a talk with your doctor before beginning a program. For example:</p> <p><b>Diabetes-</b> Blood sugar drops with physical activity so it is crucial that you check your blood sugar level prior to any activity. If you are insulin dependent or use other diabetes medication, you may need to have a snack first to help prevent low blood sugar.</p> <p><b>Heart disease-</b> Exercise may bring on shortness of breath, chest pain, dizziness, or an irregular heartbeat so it is very important to understand what exercises would be safe for your condition.</p> <p><b>Arthritis-</b> Since joints and muscles tend to be stiff, taking a warm shower or bath may ease pain and relax the muscles and joints prior to exercising.</p>	<p>Speak with your doctor first to determine which exercises are safe for your chronic condition. A doctor can also recommend certain exercises to increase strength or lessen pain.</p> <p>It's important to understand how a specific condition might be affected by exercise. For example:</p> <p><b>Low back pain-</b> Choose low-impact aerobic exercises, such as swimming or walking, to prevent stress on your back.</p> <p><b>Asthma-</b> Many exercises cause asthma flare-ups so consider shorter durations of exercise, such as volleyball or tennis. Keep your inhaler with you if you use one.</p> <p><b>Arthritis-</b> You will need to take into account your type of arthritis and which joints are affected by exercising. Speak with your doctor or a physical therapist to come up with a plan that will provide the greatest benefit and the least amount of stress on your joints.</p>	<p>Don't force yourself to exercise harder or more often if you can't. If you are experiencing shortness of breath, pain, or can't continue, ease off and begin gradually the next time.</p> <p>Exercise intensity is gauged in one of two basic ways:</p> <p><b>How do you feel-</b> Exercise intensity is how you feel while exercising – not what others feel. What's easier for others may be harder for you but it's your perception that matters.</p> <p><b>Heart rate-</b> Knowing your heart rate during exercise helps you know exercise intensity. Usually, the higher the heart rate, the higher the intensity.</p> <p>Here are a few tips to help evaluate exercise intensity:</p> <p><b>Moderate-</b> You aren't out of breath, have a light sweat 10 minutes or so in, and you can carry on a conversation.</p> <p><b>Vigorous-</b> You have rapid breathing, sweat after a few minutes, and can say only a few words without stopping for breath.</p>	<p>One of the hardest things to do is to motivate yourself to begin an exercise program. Sticking to one can be even harder.</p> <p>Try some of the following tips to help keep you on track.</p> <p><b>Set realistic goals-</b> Setting realistic goals will help you stick to your program. Don't tell yourself you are going to do more than you can actually accomplish. Never try to live up to other's expectations.</p> <p><b>Choose a fun program-</b> Your program should be enjoyable and something to look forward to. If you are dreading it, stop and change it up.</p> <p><b>Exercise with others-</b> Seek out a friend, join a gym, or, if you have a chronic condition, have your doctor recommend a program or activity with others with a similar condition.</p> <p><b>Take short walks-</b> If you can't fit exercise into your schedule, take a few short walks a day or, if you can, take stairs. Any movement counts.</p>

<sup>(1)</sup> Information in article: [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)

This is informational only, not a replacement for the medical advice of your physician.