

## Physical Activity with Heart Failure

### Why should I exercise if I have a heart problem?

Regular exercise and general activity, such as walking, can help your heart and blood pressure. It can actually reduce some of your heart failure symptoms by helping your body use oxygen more efficiently. Regular exercise also helps your bones and muscles and will make you feel better overall.

### How active should I be and how much should I exercise?

Generally, your healthcare provider will want you to be as active as possible, since activity and exercise keep you conditioned. Being active means walking every day at a normal pace and completing usual activities in and outside of your home.

Talk to your healthcare provider before starting an exercise program. Your healthcare provider will tell you how much exercise you can do. When your healthcare provider does not provide specific instructions for an exercise plan, consider the following exercise routine:

- Begin with a 5 minute warm up that includes stretching.
- Complete 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic (walking fast, bicycling, and swimming) exercise.
- Build up to 20–30 minutes slowly. Initially, exercise for only 10 minutes (or less).
- Cool down with 5 minutes of exercises similar to warm up exercises (including stretching). You should work up to exercising 5 days a week (over weeks or months).
- If you become short of breath or fatigued when exercising, take a short break (1–3 minutes) and then proceed more slowly.

Over time, you should expect that your breathing ability and fatigue will improve and you should be able to walk farther and faster. Be sure to use a cane or other support if you know your gait is weak or unsteady.

### What type of exercise should I do?

It is important that you feel comfortable with the exercises you are doing. If you choose exercises you enjoy, then you are more likely to continue long term.

*Flexibility exercises* can be used to warm up before aerobic exercise and for cool down after. Flexibility exercises help your muscles stretch so they won't become injured and also help with balance, range of motion, and joint flexibility.

*Aerobic exercises are vigorous*, steady physical activity (swimming or walking fast) that uses large muscle groups. This type of exercise helps your heart get stronger and helps your body use oxygen better.

*Strengthening exercises* involve lifting weights or using resistance to strengthen your muscles.

Some forms of heart failure may require that you limit your exercise level; this means that you can exercise, but you need to focus on stretching or low impact exercises.

### What should I do to keep my weight down?

Flexibility	Low Impact	High impact
Stretching	Walking	Jogging
Tai chi	Water aerobics	Jumping rope
Yoga	Low-impact aerobics	Bicycling
		Rowing
		Weight lifting
		Resistance tubing/bands

**If you have questions about your physical activity level, ask your healthcare provider or get advice from a trainer who has experience working with people who have heart failure.**

