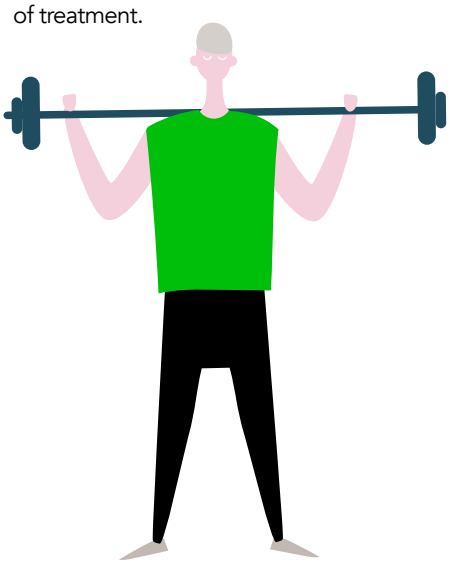
Build Activity Into Your Everyday Life

Heart Disease

"The minute I get short of breath or feel my heart racing a little, I worry. If I am walking I sit down somewhere and wonder if my heart is going to be ok. Will I be ok?" Does this sound familiar? Do you wonder if you'll "ever feel normal again?"

It's a natural (protective) response to try and avoid activities that cause pain and or breathlessness. However, the less active you are, the greater the risk of your heart disease getting worse. A small amount of prevention is better than a large amount of treatment.



A good place to start may be a local cardiac rehabilitation class. Cardiac rehab doesn't change your past, but it can help you improve your heart's future. Cardiac rehab is a medically supervised programme designed to improve your cardiovascular health if you have experienced a heart attack, heart failure, angioplasty or heart surgery.

Find out from your doctor or physical therapist where you can join. The classes are usually held in a controlled environment where they can monitor your vital signs while you exercise. This will help you slowly build your confidence and fitness before going out on your own. They often also incorporate educational times to learn about stress management, coping strategies and to gain a better understanding of your condition.

The benefits of being more active if you already have a heart condition, include:

1. **Live longer**
2. **Improve** your energy and fitness levels and quality of life
3. **Improve** the blood flow around the body. Regular physical activity triggers a cascade of 'chemical' responses within the lining of the blood vessels, causing a dilation of the vessels and preventing platelets from sticking together. This improves the blood flow within and around the heart as well as to the rest of your body.
4. **Help prevent** early death and hospital admissions. Physical activity reduces the overall risk of coronary heart disease and stroke by 20–30% in men and 10–20% in women.
5. **Help prevent** fatigue and stress.
6. **Lower your risk factors** for diabetes and blood pressure.

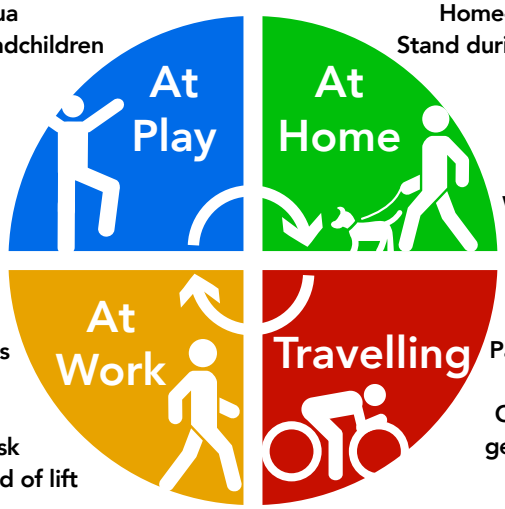
Physical activity also has benefits for those that suffer from chest pain or angina, including:

1. **Increasing** blood flow to the heart
2. **Improving** perception of chest pain
3. **Improving** how effectively your heart beats and pumps blood out around your body
4. **Helping to prevent** inflammation within the blood vessels, which can reduce your risk of developing clots
5. **Helping to prevent** risk of further heart attacks
6. **Helping to prevent** development of heart failure.

All these benefits will help you feel better about yourself and your condition, improve your sleep, daily routine and mood by releasing hormones called endorphins which are 'feel good' hormones. Your energy and fitness levels will improve and you'll feel less breathless, less fearful and more able to participate in activities or do daily chores.

Making everyday life more active

Apart from formal exercise or group activities, you can build activity into your everyday life. Small changes will ultimately make big differences to your quality of life.
Ideas for making everyday life more active include:



- **Swimming or aqua**
- **Playing with grandchildren**
- **Singing**
- **Walking club**
- **Exercise class**
- **Pilates, yoga, Thai Chi**

- **Home-based exercises**
- **Stand during advert break**
- **Walking**
- **Singing**
- **Gardening**
- **Housework**
- **Walking the dog**

- **Take active breaks**
- **Walking meetings**
- **Stand when on the telephone**
- **Stand at your desk**
- **Take stairs instead of lift**

- **Cycling**
- **Walk**
- **Park further away in the car park**
- **On public transport get off a stop earlier and walk**

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So, now that you have an idea of the many benefits of physical activity, you may be motivated to do more, but still have some fears and concerns to overcome. Here are some specific tips regarding your condition and how to prepare yourself for being more active.

Concern	Advice
What do I do if I get chest pain?	**Stop, sit down and rest**. Use your GTN spray or tablets for an acute attack. The pain should go away within 5 minutes, if not use your spray or medication again. If the pain still persists, call emergency numbers. **Avoid vigorous exercises** (where the effort is such you are unable to speak a full sentence while exercising), keep to moderate intensity exercise and always start slow and build up gradually. **Always** carry your medication with you. **The more physical activity you do**, the stronger your heart muscle will get, and this will stimulate the growth of new vessels to improve its own blood flow. The heart becomes stronger and functions better resulting in chest pain being less severe and less frequent.
I am already breathless, being active will make it worse	**Mild breathlessness is normal** for anyone doing activity. The fitter you become over time, the less breathless you will be. Activity improves your lungs and heart's ability to work efficiently. Also, the more you do, the stronger your muscles become and they in turn they demand less oxygen, reducing your level of breathlessness.
What intensity is safe?	**There is no evidence** to suggest that doing exercise at a low or moderate intensity can cause harm. So, whatever you are doing make sure you can speak (or sing to yourself) relatively comfortably throughout – this will ensure the intensity is not too high.
I am worried about having a heart attack if I start exercising	**The risk of dying during physical activity is very low**. The risk to your health in doing nothing is far greater. The risk of death while exercising for men is 1 per 23 million hours and 1 per 36.5 million hours for women. Avoid sudden vigorous activity to be safe. Gradually increase your level of activity over time especially in the 3 months to be safe.
How do I know when to stop exercising?	**A slight increase in breathlessness and muscle soreness is normal** with activity, especially when getting started. This is normal and should subside immediately after completing exercise. Any muscle soreness should also resolve within 24–48 hours, if the pain persists maybe you did a little too much and should cut down a little for the next few weeks and then gradually build up again. Any dizziness, excessive shortness of breath, sickness, blacking out, chest pain – stop immediately and wait for the symptoms to settle within minutes. If they do not, then call for help.
I am already so tired and now you want me to do more?	**Physical activity is the most important treatment for persistent fatigue** as it helps with body conditioning and boosts energy levels. It can ultimately help you gain control of your body and health. **The more active you are, the stronger your muscles become** making tasks seem easier and requiring less effort. In addition, stronger muscles have better blood flow and use less oxygen, making you feel fitter and less tired. This will help motivate you to do more.

The Last Word

A good idea before starting an activity is to sit down with your therapist or even a family member or friend and write down what it is you want to achieve. Set goals, easy achievable ones initially. These will help build self-esteem and confidence. Then you can start looking from short-term easier goals (which may be as simple as walking 10 minutes every day, or achieving a walk around the block 3 times a week) to middle- and long-term ones, extending over the coming months and year.

'Action planning' is the next step. Write down what you are going to do each day or as a weekly plan. Keeping these plans, together with a daily diary, will help you stay motivated and see the improvements over time. You can use self-monitoring devices like pedometers, wrist-worn accelerometers or smartphones to keep track of your daily step count. There are also many activity apps that can be downloaded to mobile phones to help you monitor your activity levels, motivate you or provide you with daily exercise routines. Get help and advice from your physical therapist about what would best suit you and your condition.

Make sure you have support – be it family and friends or a physical therapist, support group or exercise programme. The right support will be invaluable in keeping you motivated and encouraged, particularly on those bad days, and make you accountable for changing your life!

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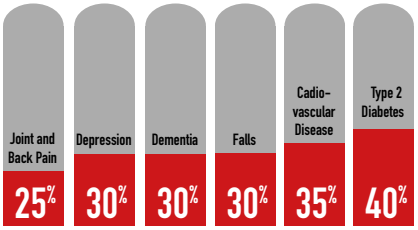
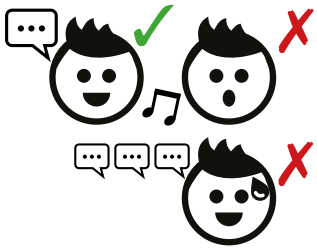
Gold Standard Exercise Recommendations for Health

If Exercise Was A Pill

Reduce your risk by being more active. Staying physically active reduces your chances of suffering from



What is Moderate Intensity Versus Vigorous Intensity Activity?



On a scale of 0–10

Moderate intensity = 5 or 6
think "Can talk, but not sing"

Vigorous intensity = 7 or 8
think "Difficulty talking without pausing"

What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Between the Ages of 5 – 17?

- 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity – every day
- > 60 minutes daily will give even better health benefits
- Most of the daily physical activity should be aerobic
- But should incorporate vigorous - intensity activities that strengthen muscle and bone, at least 3 times per week

What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Between 18 – 64?

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity
- Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes
- 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 150 of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity brings even greater health benefits
- Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week.

What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Over 65 Years of Age?

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity
- Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes
- 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 150 of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity brings even greater health benefits
- Activities that enhance balance and prevent falls on 3 or more days per week
- Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups, on 2 or more days a week
- The goal is to be as physically active as your abilities and conditions allow.

Reference: Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health, World Health Organisation 2018

How Activity Intensity Reduces Your Risk of Dying

Reference: Domains of physical activity and all-cause mortality: systematic review and dose-response meta-analysis of cohort studies. http://bit.ly/2S7BXOW

First Steps to Being More Active

TIP If you are starting out try breaking your daily goal into shorter bouts of 10 minutes at a time

Gradually increase the exercise intensity

Join friends to make it more enjoyable

Pick activities you find fun and mix them up

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