

How exercise helps your heart

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(HealthDay)—You already know that exercise is good for your health and your heart, both to prevent heart disease and, for those who already have a heart-related condition, to make managing it easier.

But you might be even more motivated to work out if you better understand exactly how exercise helps.

Studies have found two important benefits from exercise. First, it improves [cardiorespiratory fitness](#), or CRF. That's the capacity of both your heart and your lungs to provide muscles with oxygen. It's an excellent indicator of how much you exercise, and is used as a diagnostic tool and even a predictor of future health. Your doctor can order a test to measure your CRF. It typically involves doing a treadmill workout while key vital signs are monitored and measured.

Next are positive changes in certain biomarkers. Think of them as risk factors for [heart disease](#), such as LDL (the "bad" cholesterol) and C-reactive protein, which is linked to inflammation and many types of diseases.

Exercise also improves your body's use of insulin, making blood sugar easier to regulate. Those under age 50 and people with [high blood pressure](#), metabolic syndrome and type 2 diabetes often experience the greatest benefits.

Are *you* getting enough exercise? See how your weekly schedule stacks up against the American Heart Association recommendations:

- Get a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity at least five days a week for a total of 150 minutes. Or a minimum of 25 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity at least three days a week for a total of 75 minutes. Or a combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. This can be divided into two or three 10-to-15-minute sessions per day.
- Get moderate- to high-intensity muscle strengthening at least two

non-consecutive days a week.

Note: For lowering [blood pressure](#) and cholesterol and the risk of heart attack or stroke, do an average of 40 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity three or four times weekly.

While experts say that any exercise is better than none at all, building up to recommended amounts is key to a healthy heart.

But be sure to check with your doctor before setting out on an [exercise](#) regimen.

More information: The Cleveland Clinic has more on the role of [exercise](#) in improving the health of your heart.

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