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# First Steps for Fitness

## Easy Exercise Tips to Help Lower Your Cholesterol

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**Exercise alone — or in combination with diet — is an essential part of any plan to lower cholesterol and slow the progression of atherosclerosis, the progressive buildup of plaque in the arteries.**

One major cause of atherosclerosis is high levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol, which play a role in the formation of plaque buildup. For many of us, this plaque starts building up in our arteries in early adulthood and gets worse over time. Other factors can also contribute to the progression of atherosclerosis, including a family history of early heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, cigarette smoking, and being overweight or obese.

How much exercise you need will depend on your medical condition and your current fitness level. Talk to your doctor before starting any new exercise plan. Then try to exercise at least 30 minutes a day, most days of the week — if not all days. Ask your doctor about an exercise plan that's best for you, and then try to stick with it every day.

Here are some great tips on how you can start an exercise program, and, more importantly, how you can stick with it.

### Staying Motivated

Remember to have fun! Choose exercises that you enjoy. Read, listen to music, or watch TV while riding a stationary bicycle. Find fun things to do, like taking a walk through the zoo or around the mall. Take dance lessons. Learn how to play tennis. Go hiking. Whatever the activity, the key is that it should be fun. Try some of these ideas to get started.



- Trick yourself into exercising — painlessly. Take the stairs. Park in the spot farthest from the door
- Mix it up. Try different exercises so that you don't get bored. Walk one day, bicycle the next. Consider activities like dancing and racquet sports, and even chores like raking leaves and cleaning the house, just to add variety
- Find a convenient time and place to exercise so that it becomes part of your daily routine
- Wear comfortable clothes
- Forget what you've heard about "no pain, no gain." It's normal to feel a bit sore and stiff after you first start exercising, but it's not normal to feel pain. Stop exercising if you're really hurting and see your doctor. Remember to start out slowly and work your way up to a higher level. Your body needs time to adjust, so don't push yourself too hard at first

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- Drink lots of water before, during, and after exercise. Some patients, such as heart failure patients, may be told to limit their fluid intake. Please check with your physician
- Remember that it's OK to take a break when you need one
- Bring a friend. An exercise buddy can help you stick with it
- Give yourself a small reward every time you reach a goal

## How Physically Active Are You?

Many people believe that the only way to be physically active is to go to a gym or run in a park for an hour. The truth is that any movement is good for you. You can fit a considerable amount of physical activity into your daily routine by doing chores or things you enjoy. Take a look at the following moderate and vigorous activities that can help keep you fit.

Gardening and Yard Work	
MODERATE (3.5-7.0 CAL/MIN)	VIGOROUS (MORE THAN 7.0 CAL/MIN)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Raking the lawn</li> <li>■ Bagging grass or leaves</li> <li>■ Light shoveling (less than 10 lb per minute)</li> <li>■ Weeding garden beds</li> <li>■ Planting trees</li> <li>■ Hauling branches</li> <li>■ Stacking wood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Heavy or rapid shoveling (10 lb or more per minute)</li> <li>■ Digging ditches</li> <li>■ Carrying large logs</li> <li>■ Swinging an axe</li> <li>■ Pushing a nonmotorized lawn mower</li> </ul>
Housework	
MODERATE (3.5-7.0 CAL/MIN)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Scrubbing the floor or bathtub</li> <li>■ Hanging laundry on a clothesline</li> <li>■ Sweeping</li> <li>■ Washing windows</li> </ul>	
Home Repair	
MODERATE (3.5-7.0 CAL/MIN)	VIGOROUS (MORE THAN 7.0 CAL/MIN)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cleaning gutters</li> <li>■ Refinishing furniture</li> <li>■ Sanding floors</li> <li>■ Laying or removing carpet or tiles</li> <li>■ Painting inside or outside</li> <li>■ Wallpapering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Carrying heavy loads of 50 lb or more</li> <li>■ Taking loads of 25 lb or more up a ladder or flight of stairs</li> <li>■ Handsawing hardwood</li> </ul>

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## Dancing

### MODERATE (3.5-7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Ballroom dancing
- Line dancing
- Square dancing
- Modern/disco dancing

### VIGOROUS (MORE THAN 7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Any energetic dancing

## Walking

### MODERATE (3.5-7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Walking at 3 to 4.5 mph on a level surface
- Hiking

### VIGOROUS (MORE THAN 7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Racewalking and aerobic walking at 5 mph or faster
- Mountain climbing

## Biking

### MODERATE (3.5-7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Biking 5 to 9 mph on level terrain

### VIGOROUS (MORE THAN 7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Biking more than 9 mph
- Biking on uphill terrain

## Warm Weather Sports

### MODERATE (3.5-7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Softball
- Basketball — shooting baskets
- Volleyball

### VIGOROUS (MORE THAN 7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Football
- Soccer
- Beach volleyball

## Winter Sports

### MODERATE (3.5-7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Downhill skiing — light effort
- Snowmobiling
- Ice skating

### VIGOROUS (MORE THAN 7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Cross-country skiing
- Downhill skiing — vigorous effort
- Tobogganing
- Playing ice hockey

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## Calisthenics

### MODERATE (3.5-7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Yoga

### VIGOROUS (MORE THAN 7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Karate
- Judo
- Tae kwon do
- Jujitsu

## Water Sports

### MODERATE (3.5-7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Recreational swimming
- Aquatic aerobics
- Waterskiing
- Snorkeling
- Kayaking in a lake or in calm water
- Surfing

### VIGOROUS (MORE THAN 7.0 CAL/MIN)

- Swimming — steady-paced laps
- Water polo
- Scuba diving
- Water basketball
- Kayaking in white-water rapids

## Exercise Safety Tips

Whether you are exercising at the gym or doing daily chores as your activity, one thing remains the same: while it's normal to be sore after you exercise, you shouldn't feel pain. Follow these tips to make sure you stay on your feet and in good shape for the long term. And remember to talk with your doctor before starting a new exercise program. And remember too that healthy, fit bodies come in all sizes. Whatever your size or shape, start exercising now and keep moving for a healthier life.

### Stop exercising right away if you

- Feel pain or pressure in the left-chest or mid-chest area — or in the neck, jaw, left shoulder, or left arm
- Feel dizzy or sick
- Break out in a cold sweat
- Experience muscle cramps
- Notice pain in your joints, feet, ankles, or legs — you could hurt yourself if you ignore the pain

### Slow down if you run out of breath

- Breathlessness is a sign that you may be overexerting yourself

### Drink water

- Drink water before, during, and after exercise (even water workouts) to replace the water you lose by sweating
- Water helps every cell and organ in your body function properly — it cushions your joints, improves your bowel patterns, and keeps your body cool

### Don't exercise right after you eat

- Wait about 2 hours to perform strenuous activity after a big meal (but a 5- to 10-minute walk is OK)
- If you eat small meals, you can exercise more often

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### Wear the right clothes

- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting tops so you can move easily
- Women should wear a good support bra
- Wear supportive athletic shoes for weight-bearing activities
- Wear clothes made of fabrics that absorb sweat and remove it from your skin
- In cold weather, wear a knit hat to keep you warm when you exercise outdoors
- Wear a hat with a brim to help keep you cool when you exercise outdoors
- Wear sunscreen to cover all areas of exposed skin when you exercise outdoors

### Fitness-related Reading and Other Resources

If you are looking for more information about how exercise can help you manage your cholesterol, the following resources may be helpful.

#### ***Walking . . . A Step in the Right Direction***

NIH Publication No. 07-4155, 2007

This pamphlet explains how to start a walking program, presents a sample program, and shows stretches for warming up and cooling down. The pamphlet is available by contacting the NIH by phone at 301-496-4000 or through its Web site at [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov).

#### ***Great Shape: The First Fitness Guide for Large Women.*** Pat Lyons and Debby Burgard, iUniverse Incorporated, 2000

This book urges women to be physically active for fun, fitness, and positive body image instead of for weight loss. The authors describe a healthy lifestyle program that includes walking, swimming, dancing, martial arts, bicycling, and more. Available from [www.bodypositive.com](http://www.bodypositive.com).

#### ***Don't Weight: Eat Healthy and Get Moving NOW*** Kelly Bliss, Buy Books on the Web.com, 2001

This book provides motivation and information for self-care and self-acceptance. It also teaches problem-solving techniques. There is information that will help you plan and achieve a fitness program that can be sustained for a lifetime. Available by phone at 877-KellyBliss or on the Web at [www.kellybliss.com](http://www.kellybliss.com).

#### ***Water Exercise***

Martha D. White, Human Kinetics Publishers, 1995

This book presents water exercises for fitness and muscle tone as well as exercises for injuries, post-surgical rehabilitation, and other special needs. Available from Human Kinetics, P.O. Box 5076, Champaign, IL 61825, by phone at 800-747-4457, or on the Web at [www.humankinetics.com](http://www.humankinetics.com).

#### ***Easy Does It Yoga***

American Yoga Association, Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 2000

This book presents a program of exercises, breathing, meditation, philosophy, and nutrition for older adults and those with physical limitations. Simple chair exercises and more challenging standing and floor exercises are described. Available from the American Yoga Association, P.O. Box 19986, Sarasota, FL 34276 or on the Web at [www.americanyogaassociation.org](http://www.americanyogaassociation.org).