



Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise, also known as cardio or endurance exercise, is any activity that causes you to breathe faster and more deeply, increasing the amount of oxygen in your blood. In aerobic fitness, your heart, lungs and blood vessels transport oxygen more effectively throughout your body, making it easier to do physical work.

Aerobic exercise includes any physical activity that uses large muscle groups and increases your heart and breathing rate. Walking, jogging, biking, swimming, dancing, water aerobics, fitness classes, many sports — even leaf raking, snow shoveling and vacuuming can be aerobic activities.

How often? Start out with two or three times a week. As you become more fit, add more days and exercise longer. Aim for at least two hours and 30 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity or one hour and 15 minutes a week of vigorous aerobic activity. It's best to spread your activity across the whole week.

How hard? Start slowly and work your way up to a “moderate” level of exercise. A moderate level is a brisk walk (about 14-23 minutes to walk 1 mile) or a similar amount of effort in another activity. Moderate-intensity activity causes a slightly increased rate of breathing, and it feels “light” to “somewhat hard”. You can easily carry on a conversation while exercising at this level. Examples of a vigorous level of activity are walking a mile in less than 14 minutes, jogging, cycling, and playing endurance sports . These activities result in increased rates of breathing and sweating and feel “somewhat hard” to “very hard.”

As you become more fit, you need to exercise more to get the benefits of exercise. Increase your speed or intensity of exercise, increase your time spent exercising, or exercise more often.

What will aerobic activity do for you? It helps you control your weight, increase your stamina and reduce fatigue, activate your immune system and make you less susceptible to illness, reduce your risk of chronic disease, manage high blood pressure and diabetes, strengthen your heart, boost your “good” cholesterol, and lower your “bad” cholesterol, improve your mood, reduce cognitive decline in older adults, and live longer!

We recommend:

- Work up to at least 30 minutes of activity a day.
- Be active most days of the week.
- Include a warm-up period before and a cool-down period after each exercise session.
- Make exercise part of your routine.
- Add in some variety to keep it interesting and get a “cross training” benefit.
- There are many good online resources about aerobic fitness. Look at www.mayoclinic.com, www.sportsmedicine.about.com , www.sparkpeople.com, and the USDHHS Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans at www.health.gov/paguidelines .