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information

I have heart failure ... *Should I exercise?* YES!

But there are some things you should know. If you plan carefully for regular exercise and listen to your body's signals, exercise can improve the quality of your life.

Regular exercise can help you feel better

- Did you know that if you feel tired a lot, it may be because you are not active enough? Although regular rest is important, you need exercise to boost your body's energy level.
- After you start exercising, you will soon notice you can move around better and stay active longer.
- Your exercise sessions will work best if they are short, and done several times a day. This works much better than one long session that leaves you feeling tired for the rest of the day.
- What kind of exercise should you do? Many patients with heart failure have success with a walking exercise program. Others swim or use a stationary bike or other equipment. Please ask your health care provider for advice on an exercise routine that is best for you.
- Some people with heart failure think that sex is "off limits." This is not true. You should resume sexual activity gradually, in familiar settings, and with a familiar partner. If certain activities or positions don't work out, don't be discouraged. With patience, you and your partner will learn what is comfortable and rewarding for you both.

Plan exercise into your day

How do you make sure you have the time and energy to exercise and fit in your other activities? Planning! Here's one way to do it:

- Every morning (or at night, before going to bed), make a mental or written list of what you need to do that day. Make sure your exercise sessions and rest periods are included. Ask a family member or friend to help you if you want.
- Now add a schedule. Start with the time you usually wake up. Plan your activities, exercise sessions, and rest periods for the day.
- Always alternate easy tasks or activities with harder ones.
- Always schedule your rest periods for the times of your day when you feel most tired. You don't have to go to bed or sleep in order to rest. And you don't have to rest for any particular length of time. Twenty minutes may be enough for some people. Others may need an hour.
- Now you're ready for your day! Remember to follow your health care provider's advice regarding how much and what type of exercise you should do. Call your provider with any questions you have about your exercises or other activities.

Listening to your body's signals

Safe exercise means listening to your body if it is trying to tell you something! Here are some signals your body might send.

***Shortness of breath**:* When you exercise, it is normal to start breathing harder. But it is not normal for your breathing to be very uncomfortable. If you can't speak, you are breathing too hard. What to do? Rest until the feeling goes away. If you still feel short of breath after resting, call your health care provider for advice.

If you feel better after resting, try to go back to a lighter or easier version of the exercise you were doing. **Severe shortness of breath might mean you were working too hard.**

***Heart fluttering or palpitations**:* You may feel your heart "pounding" or "skipping beats" or "turning over" in your chest. What to do? Stop exercising and rest until the feeling goes away. Then go on to your activity for that day. Don't continue with this exercise session. If the feeling does not go away, call your health care provider for advice.
During your next scheduled session, try a lighter or easier version of the exercise you were doing. The heart palpitations may be a signal that you were working too hard. You should talk to your health care provider about this feeling. This is especially important if you get the feeling at rest or during sleep.

***Dizziness or lightheadedness**:* If you feel dizzy or feel faint, stop exercising. Sit down or lie down until the feeling goes away. If the feeling does not go away, call your health care provider.

If you feel OK after resting, you can try to finish your exercise session, but do a lighter or easier version of the exercise. The dizziness may mean you were working too fast or too hard.

***Chest pain or angina**:* Any time you get chest pain or angina, STOP exercising. This means STOP if you feel: pressure in the chest; squeezing in the chest; pain or burning in the chest, throat, or left arm; or any unusual sensation or discomfort above your waist.
If you've had this feeling before and have a routine to follow, such as taking nitroglycerin, follow your chest pain routine. If you've never had this feeling before, get help right away. Remember, if you had chest pain during exercise, you must stop. Don't exercise again until you see or talk with your health care provider. You may need adjustments in your medicine, or you may need more tests.

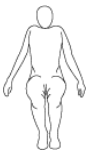
Let your health care provider know if you have problems exercising or have any new symptoms. Remember, your provider, or someone covering for your provider, is available by phone 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. **If any of these problems are severe or don't go away with a short rest, please call 911 for help; do not travel to the hospital by car.**

Warm-up/cool-down exercises

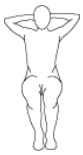
Whatever form of exercise you're doing, be sure to warm up before you begin, and cool down afterwards. This gives your body time to adjust gradually as you change your activity level, and also helps prevent injuries. Here are some warm-up/cool down exercises to try.

Ankle pumps: Raise toes, then heels

Leg kicks: Raise one foot, straighten knee, then lower. Repeat for other leg.



Shoulder shrugs: Raise shoulders up towards ears, then lower.



Chest and shoulder stretch: Clasp hands behind head, bring elbows together, then apart.

Knee march: While seated, "march" with your legs.

Calf stretch: Bring one foot behind the other and lean forward. Hold for 5 seconds. Do other leg.

Toe raise: Lift heels and toes up and down.

March in place: Lift one knee, then the other. Stay in the same spot.

Side leg lifts: Raise one leg out to the side. Repeat with the other leg.

Trunk side bends: Put your hands on your waist and bend to the right. Then bend to the left.