

# Exercise to Your Heart's Content

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**P**hysical fitness is at the heart of good health. In fact, research now shows that exercise is even recommended for those who have experienced a heart attack or are at risk for heart disease. According to experts, exercise strengthens the heart and improves general health.

Of course, people with heart problems should always consult their physician before beginning an exercise program.

While moderate activity for 30 minutes on most days results in health benefits, many heart patients can exercise as vigorously as the average person.

Regular aerobic exercise increases your fitness level and your mood. Spending too many hours in front of the television, however, can put you on a downward slide into more health problems such as obesity, stroke, and diabetes.

It is clear that healthy people are less likely to suffer with heart disease if they are consistently active over many years. But it's never too late to begin exercising. If you have heart disease, exercise may prevent progression of the disease and development of other diseases. It can sometimes restore much of your normal level of physical abilities. Exercise has also been shown to reduce depression and anxiety.

Research shows that people who begin exercising after their first heart attack have better survival rates.

Aerobic activity provides the best results. Such activity trains the heart to work more efficiently during exercise and at rest. Brisk walking, jumping rope, jogging, bicycling, cross-country skiing, and dancing are examples of aerobic activities that increase endurance.

If you are just getting started, you feel capable of exercise, and your doctor has told you it is okay to exercise, try starting with moderate aerobic activity for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week. It is important to exercise routinely and consistently.

Be sure to talk to your doctor before beginning any vigorous exercise program. When exercising, stop immediately if you feel unusual pain or unusual shortness of breath, feel dizzy or sick, or have an irregular pulse.

Physical activity also helps build healthy bones, muscles, and joints and reduces the risk of colon cancer and stroke.

If you would like to read more information about this and other heart-related topics, please visit our web site at [UPMCHHealthPlan.com](http://UPMCHHealthPlan.com). ▲

## Special Web Package Smoking a Danger to People with Heart Disease

Here's a lesson to take to heart: smoking can put you at risk for coronary heart disease.

According to the American Heart Association, cigarette smoking is the most important preventable cause of premature death in the United States.

It is one of the six major independent risk factors for coronary heart disease that can be modified or controlled. By itself, smoking increases the risk of coronary disease. And when it acts in connection with other factors – such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and physical inactivity – the risk is greatly increased.

For more information on this topic and how you or someone close to you can curb the smoking habit, visit the special "Smoking Cessation" section at [UPMCHHealthPlan.com/spotlight/smoking.html](http://UPMCHHealthPlan.com/spotlight/smoking.html).