

# Women's *Heart Advantage*

## Heart Healthy Information: Exercising for a Healthy Heart

### Are you exercising enough?

Women do not get enough exercise. In fact, 60 percent of women in the U.S. don't get the recommended amount of exercise. Lack of exercise increases the chance that you will gain weight and develop high blood pressure and diabetes — which may lead to heart disease. This could mean more doctors' visits, hospitalizations and use of medications. For older women, lack of exercise also increases the risk of breaking bones.

### What you can do

As little as 30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week gives your heart a great deal of protection. Regular exercise can help with the following:

- Lower blood pressure
- Improve circulation
- Reduce blood clots
- Improve quality of sleep
- Increase muscular strength
- Improve stamina/endurance
- Decrease stress
- Increase your ability to burn calories
- Improve feeling of well-being
- Reduce body fat
- Increase HDL (good cholesterol)
- Decrease constipation

Regular exercise is a powerful way to reduce your chance of heart disease.

### Getting started

1. Check with your doctor to make sure you are OK to start an exercise program. If you are over 60 or have cardiac risk factors, you may need testing before beginning a regular exercise program.
2. **Start slowly**
  - Warm-up 5 minutes before exercising by stretching and walking slowly.
  - Start out with 10 minutes of moderate exercise such as walking. Over two to three weeks, you should be able to increase to 30 to 40 minutes.
  - Engage in activities such as walking, biking, dancing or swimming.
3. **Add weight training to your exercise program**

Strength training two to three times per week can create stronger muscles and help reduce the risk of weak bones and falls. This should only take you 10 to 15 minutes.

  - Use low-level weights for arms (1 to 5 pounds), slightly more for legs.
  - Start with one set of repetitions 12 to 15 times for each exercise.

*over...*



Santa Cruz  
Medical Foundation

A Sutter Health Affiliate

Women's Heart Advantage is an educational program sponsored by the doctors, nurses and hospitals of Sutter Health to raise awareness of women's heart disease, risk factors, early detection, and treatment. This information is provided to help you understand how certain factors can affect your chances for heart disease and how to help control them. For more information, visit [www.hearts.sutterhealth.org](http://www.hearts.sutterhealth.org).

- Slowly build your weight program so you can do three sets of 15 repetitions.
- Never hold your breath; always continue to breathe rhythmically. If you are holding your breath, you are lifting too much weight.

#### 4. Be safe

- Wait 30 to 60 minutes after eating.
- Don't smoke before, during, or after exercise...  
**DON'T SMOKE AT ALL!**
- Drink enough water before, during and after exercise — at least 8 ounces before and after exercise.
- Avoid exercising outside in extreme heat or cold.
- Wear good, light-weight supportive rubber-soled shoes.
- Wear light clothing.
- Listen to your body. If it hurts, if you are dizzy, or if you are too short of breath (can't talk easily) STOP. Talk to your doctor. Remember to do 5 minutes of stretches, before and after exercising, (warm-ups and cool-downs) to decrease the risk of injury and muscle aches.

#### 5. Stick with your exercise program

- Choose activities that you enjoy
- To help keep you motivated, find someone of the same activity level and exercise with them.
- Do not push too hard.
- Stay active. Use the stairs, walk the dog, and park the car as far as you can from the store.
- Don't compare yourself to others.
- Give yourself rewards for staying with an exercise program.
- Vary your activities to provide cross training, and avoid being bored.



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