**Aerobic Exercise**

Aerobic exercise is a physical activity that uses your body’s large muscle groups, is rhythmic and repetitive. It increases your heart rate and how much oxygen your body uses. Examples of aerobic exercises include walking, cycling and swimming. It reduces your risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

**What is aerobic exercise?**

Aerobic exercise is a physical activity that uses large muscle groups in your body. This type of exercise is usually rhythmic and repetitive. You can adjust the intensity of your workout, which is how hard your body works during this type of exercise.

Aerobic exercises increase your heart rate and how much oxygen your body uses. The term aerobic means “with oxygen.” When you practice aerobic exercise, your breathing controls the amount of oxygen that reaches your muscles to help you burn energy and move.

**What is the difference between aerobic and anaerobic exercises?**

Aerobic and anaerobic are terms that define how your body produces energy.

Aerobic means “with oxygen.” When you participate in a continuous activity that increases your heart rate, your cells use oxygen to produce energy. An example of aerobic exercise is walking.

Anaerobic means “without oxygen.” When you engage in a quick, high-intensity activity, your cells aren’t using oxygen to produce energy. An example of an anaerobic exercise is lifting weights.

**What are examples of aerobic exercises?**

There are a lot of different types of aerobic exercises. Some of the most common include:

* Walking or jogging.
* Cycling.
* Cardio equipment.
* Swimming.

**Walking or jogging**

Walking is one of the simplest and most available aerobic exercises. You can change the intensity to match your fitness level. Jogging is faster than walking but slower than running. Jogging puts more stress on your joints than walking and isn’t recommended if you have an injury. Other than athletic shoes, this activity doesn’t require any special equipment. You can walk almost anywhere: outdoors or indoors (malls, indoor tracks or a treadmill). This makes walking easy to continue throughout the year. Walking is a good choice for starting your first exercise program.

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**Cycling**

Cycling is an aerobic exercise that you can do on a stationary bike or a regular bicycle. You can adjust the intensity of your exercise by choosing a higher setting on your stationary bike or riding on a route with more hills or inclines. Cycling may be ideal if you have arthritis or other conditions that affect your joints. This activity helps your heart without putting too much mechanical stress on your back, hips, knees and ankles that walking can cause. If you cycle outdoors, the weather may limit your activity.

**Cardio Equipment**

Cardio equipment includes machines that increase your heart rate while you complete a repetitive motion. Some common types of cardio equipment are:

* A rowing machine.
* Stair climbers.
* An elliptical.
* A treadmill.

You can find these types of machines at your local gym or you can add one to your home. They’re usually larger and can take up a lot of space if you choose to get one for at-home use. Since there are a lot of different types of cardio machines, you should try out different ones at a gym or fitness center first. It can take time to see which machine you enjoy most and which one puts less stress on areas of your body where you may have an injury or issue. Your healthcare provider can also recommend what type of cardio machine is best for you.

**Swimming**

Swimming is a low-impact activity where you use your arms and legs to propel you through the water. The intensity of swimming increases more in open water than it does in a pool. Water aerobics and water walking are good alternatives if you have joint pain. The buoyancy provided by the water eases stress on your joints. If you plan on swimming or participating in water activities, make sure you’re swimming under the supervision of a lifeguard in case of an emergency.

**What are the benefits of aerobic exercise?**

The benefits of aerobic exercise include:

* Building stronger bones.
* Improving your muscle strength, endurance and flexibility.
* Improving your balance.
* Increasing your mental function.
* Assisting in weight management and/or weight loss.

In addition, aerobic exercise can:

* Reduce your risk of developing heart disease, hypertension, stroke or diabetes.
* Improve your lung function.
* Lower your blood pressure.
* Increase [HDL or "good" cholesterol](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/11920-cholesterol-numbers-what-do-they-mean).
* Help to better manage your blood sugar.

**What are the risks of aerobic exercises?**

Participating in physical activities can put you at risk of injury, including:

* [Sprains](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/15461-sprains-of-the-ankle-knee-and-wrist) and strains.
* [Bone fracture](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/15241-bone-fractures).
* [Joint pain](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/17752-joint-pain).
* [Muscle cramps](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/21190-muscle-cramps).
* [Pain](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/17669-muscle-pain) or soreness.

**How do I keep myself safe while doing aerobic exercises?**

You should talk with your healthcare provider before you start an exercise program. Ask what, if any, limitations you may have. If you have diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, arthritis, pulmonary conditions or other health conditions, you may need additional safety guidelines for exercise. The type of exercise you choose is a personal decision, but you should consider certain factors to reduce the risk of injury or complications and make exercise more enjoyable.

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**Preventing aerobic exercise injury**

You can take steps to prevent injury during aerobic exercise by:

* Talking to your healthcare provider before starting regular physical activity.
* Learning how to use exercise equipment safely.
* Using good techniques and performing the exercise as instructed.
* Wearing proper gear or clothing.
* Being aware of your surroundings.
* Warming up and stretching.

If you develop symptoms during exercise including, but not limited to, unusual shortness of breath; tightness in the chest; chest, shoulder or jaw pain; lightheadedness; dizziness; confusion or joint pain, you should stop exercising immediately and contact your healthcare provider.

**What is the “talk test?”**

If you’re starting a new type of aerobic exercise, you can perform the “talk test” to see if an activity is too strenuous. While performing the activity, try to carry on a conversation or speak clearly during your exercise. If talking is challenging, you may be performing an activity that’s too intense. Over time, once you build strength and stamina, you can try this test again and you might get different results.

**How often should I do aerobic exercises?**

You should get about 150 minutes of physical activity each week. The amount per week equals about 30 minutes a day, five days a week. This is the recommended minimum guideline for reducing your risk of heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol.

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It can be overwhelming to accomplish 150 minutes of aerobic activity each week. To make this amount of time easier to accomplish, follow these tips:

* Schedule time during your day for physical activity.
* Choose activities that you enjoy doing.
* Exercise in small increments of time, for example, take three shorter walks that are 10 minutes each in a day.
* Participate in activities with your friends or family.

You can do aerobic exercises every day. There’s no need to rest in between sessions unless you’re at an extreme level of training, such as [preparing for a marathon](https://health.clevelandclinic.org/how-to-train-for-a-marathon/), or if you experience reoccurring joint pain. If joint pain is a limiting factor, talk to your healthcare provider about less painful exercises.

**How do I do aerobic exercises?**

An aerobic exercise should happen in three steps:

* A warmup period.
* Progression of the exercise.
* A cooldown period.

**Warming up and cooling down**

Every session of aerobic exercise should include a warmup and cooldown period. The warmup period shouldn’t include static stretching, but should instead be a gradual increase in the pace and intensity of the exercise. This allows your body to increase blood flow to your muscles and decreases the likelihood of a muscle or joint injury. The warmup should last between five and 10 minutes. The cooldown session should last a similar amount of time as the warmup, with the pace gradually decreasing. Stretching exercises would be appropriate after aerobic exercise.

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**Progression of aerobic exercise**

Progression or movement to higher intensities, or how much work your body does during exercise, should vary during your activity. You should decide the progression of the activity based on your tolerance and strength. If you’re just starting, you should take it easy. If you’re training for a marathon, you can steadily increase the level of work your body does during your workout.

There are three ways to progress an aerobic exercise:

* Increase speed.
* Increase resistance.
* Increase duration (time).

Any of these methods, or a combination of these methods, will improve aerobic fitness. Increasing intensity should be done very gradually. You should challenge yourself for only a few minutes at a time.

**Do I need to go to a gym to do aerobic exercises?**

No, you don’t need to go to a gym or fitness center to do aerobic exercises. You can do the following aerobic exercises at home:

* Walking.
* Dancing.
* Riding a bicycle.
* Mowing the lawn (with a push mower).

If you like using specialized cardio equipment like an elliptical or treadmill, you may choose to go to a gym to do aerobic exercises.

**A note from Cleveland Clinic**

Aerobic exercises are an activity that gets you up and moving. It increases your heart rate and can make you sweat. Exercising can be challenging, but you can make it easier by doing activities thaxst you enjoy with people you like to spend time with. Talk to your healthcare provider before starting a new physical activity to make sure it’s safe. If you experience pain while exercising, stop the activity and contact your provider.