



Aerobic exercise: What 30 minutes a day can do

Investing 30 minutes a day in aerobic exercise-such as walking, bicycling or swimming-can help you live longer and healthier. In fact, aerobic exercise may be the magic bullet you've been looking for.

Take a look at the health benefits associated with aerobic exercise. See how aerobic exercise affects your heart, lungs and blood flow-and get motivated to reap the rewards

How your body responds to aerobic exercise

During aerobic exercise, you repeatedly move large muscles in your arms, legs and hips. You'll notice your body's responses quickly.

You'll breathe faster and more deeply. This maximizes the amount of oxygen in your blood. Your heart will beat faster, which increases blood flow to your muscles and back to your lungs. Your small blood vessels (capillaries) will widen to deliver more oxygen to your muscles and carry away waste products, such as carbon dioxide and lactic acid. Your body will even release endorphins, natural painkillers that promote an increased sense of well-being.

What aerobic exercise does for your health

Regardless of your age, weight or athletic ability, aerobic exercise is good for you. As your body adapts to regular aerobic exercise, you'll get stronger and more efficient. Consider some of the many ways that aerobic exercise can help you feel better and enjoy life to the fullest.

Regular aerobic exercise can:

- **Reduce health risks.** Aerobic exercise reduces the risk of many conditions, including obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, stroke and certain types of cancer. Weight-bearing aerobic exercises, such as walking, reduce the risk of osteoporosis.
- **Help you manage chronic conditions.** Aerobic exercise helps lower high blood pressure, control blood sugar and relieve chronic muscle pain. If you've had a heart attack, aerobic exercise can help prevent subsequent attacks.
- **Keep excess pounds at bay.** Combined with a health diet, aerobic exercise can help you lose weight-and keep it off.
- **Ward off viral illnesses.** Aerobic exercise activates your immune system. This leaves you less susceptible to minor viral illnesses, such as colds and flu.
- **Keep your arteries clear.** Aerobic exercise increases the concentration of high-density lipoprotein (HDL, or "good") cholesterol and decreases the concentration of low-density lipoprotein (LDL, or "bad") cholesterol in your blood. The potential results? Less buildup of plaques in your arteries.
- **Strengthen your heart.** A stronger heart doesn't need to beat as fast. A stronger heart also pumps blood more efficiently, which improves blood flow to all parts of your body.
- **Boost your mood.** Aerobic exercise can ease the gloominess of depression and reduce the tension associated with anxiety, as well as promote relaxation.
- **Increase your stamina.** Aerobic exercise may make you tired in the short term. But over the long term, you'll enjoy increased stamina and reduced fatigue.
- **Stay active and independent as you get older.** Aerobic exercise keeps your muscles strong, which can help you maintain mobility as you get older. Aerobic exercise also keeps your mind sharp. Researchers say that at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three days a week can reduce cognitive decline in older adults.

Need more convincing? People who engage in regular aerobic exercise appear to live longer than those who don't.

Start slowly

Check with your doctor before you begin to exercise. Once you have your doctor's OK, start slowly. You might walk five minutes in the morning and five minutes in the evening. The next day, add a few minutes to each walking session. Pick up the pace a bit, too. Soon, you could be walking briskly for 30 minutes a day-and reaping all the benefits of regular aerobic exercise.

Other options might include cross-country skiing, aerobic dancing, swimming, stair climbing, bicycling, jogging, elliptical training or rowing. If you have a condition that limits your ability to exercise, ask your doctor about alternatives. If you have arthritis, for example, aquatic exercises may give you the benefits of aerobic exercise without stressing your joints.

Live longer and stay healthier with just 30 minutes of aerobic exercise a day!

