**We ❤️ your heart**

Your cardio fitness – and VO2 max – is a powerful predictor of your current and future health. By better understanding these two metrics, you’re able to get fitter and strengthen your heart plus earn Vitality points and great rewards at the same time.

This Valentine’s Day, instead of your usual date night, why not plan some fun fitness activities like a romantic walk or a dance class? Your heart will thank you.

**Let’s start with the science.**

Your heart rate is the number of times your heart beats in one minute and this differs from person to person. On the whole, the fitter you are, the lower your resting heart rate will be. A healthy resting heart rate for adults is usually between 60 and 100 beats per minute.

The best way to lower your resting heart rate and increase your aerobic capacity is through exercise, with global guidelines recommending a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity at least 5 times a week. Knowing your heart rate helps you to reach the right heart rate zones when you work out – in effective, safe ways.

Explore this helpful [tool](https://www.discovery.co.za/wcm/discoverycoza/assets/vitality/benefit-guides/crf-learn-how-to-get-fitter.pdf) to learn more about exercise intensities and what type of exercise you can do at each intensity level to ensure you maximize the benefits of physical activity.

**Next up: how to improve**

Boosting your cardio fitness depends on how hard you exercise, and also how often and how long you exercise for.

We chatted to Dr Mosima Mabunda,Head of Wellness for Vitality South Africa, for her tried-and-tested combination of exercise style to help improve HR and VO2 max. Her advice? “A great way to improve your fitness is to vary the exercise intensities. I do high intensity interval sessions twice a week both at the gym and on my indoor trainer for cycling. I also do low to moderate intensity work-outs every other day of the week. Doing a variety of exercises at different intensity levels keeps things fun and fresh so that you don’t get bored and give up.”

Dr Mabunda recommends picking and choosing from three main types of exercise each week:

**ENDURANCE TRAINING**

“This is also known as cardio training and here you exercise at a comfortable to moderate level for an extended period of time. You can try fast walking, comfortable jogging, or use a cardio machine at home or at the gym. Here, you’re aiming to maintain a heart rate between 60% and 85% of your maximum heart rate.”

**INTERVAL TRAINING**

“Next, try including both shorter (1-4 minutes) intense bursts of exercise with slower recovery periods (1-4 minutes) throughout your workout session. This can include cardio like walking, running, cycling, resistance and bodyweight exercises.”

**HIGH-INTENSITY INTERVAL TRAINING (HIIT)**

“This type of training is similar to the above but involves even shorter bursts (20 - 60 seconds) of even more intense exercise followed by recovery periods. The intensity pushes your body into an anaerobic state, making fuel without oxygen, boosting fitness levels and improving overall health heart.”

Getting physically active – more often – is a big part of promoting good heart health. It’s one of the most effective ways to strengthen our heart muscle, manage a healthy weight and reduce our risk of high cholesterol, high blood sugar and high blood pressure. These conditions often lead to blood vessel damage that can cause a heart attack or stroke.

Dr Mabunda adds that it’s never too soon or late to start prioritising your fitness and heart health. “Just remember that if you’re starting out or have concerns or specific health conditions, it’s best to consult with your doctor first,” she concludes.

*For more information about Vitality’s evidence-based approach that encourages and rewards members for healthier living, visit the* [*Vitality Global website*](https://www.vitalityglobal.com/)*.*