**Attention women: Run your way to a healthier heart**

Heart disease is the leading cause of death globally, reports the World Health Organization (WHO), with an estimated 17.9 million lives lost each year[[1]](#footnote-1). But, the impact on women is often overlooked and heart disease is in fact the number one killer of women worldwide[[2]](#footnote-2). A key concern is that women are more likely than men to have a heart attack without experiencing chest pain, which can make it more difficult to diagnose.

The good news is that by controlling certain lifestyle-related risk factors, heart disease is largely preventable[[3]](#footnote-3). Nutrition, exercise, quitting smoking and limiting alcohol – all important pillars of the Vitality programme – are behavioural and with Vitality support, can be improved to lessen your risks of getting heart disease.

**Starting with exercise**

Running is a great way to improve your heart health. For women, when you run, these are just some of the benefits to your body[[4]](#footnote-4):

* Cholesterol and triglyceride levels decrease
* Healthy weight can be maintained
* Blood pressure goes down
* Stress levels reduce
* Blood circulation increases, which can help with inflammation and menstrual cramps

These benefits apply to all aerobic exercise, including running, cycling, swimming, walking, dancing, skipping or playing sport. The goal? At least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise per week, which are exercise guidelines from the American College of Sports Medicine[[5]](#footnote-5).

*TOP TIP: Try out different types of aerobic exercise to both challenge your body and prevent boredom.*

**Trail, track or treadmill**

Any type of running is good for heart health, as long as you maintain a consistent routine. This means engaging in a sustained activity that elevates your heart rate for a prolonged period of time.

Another advantage of running is that it’s one of the most accessible sports. You don’t need much equipment, just a good pair of running shoes and comfortable clothes, and it can be done almost anywhere from a trail to a track to a treadmill. Plus, it can be done solo or in a group and can be adapted to suit different fitness levels and goals.

**Ready to RUN?**

Whether you’re a casual runner or a competitive athlete, we have some easy-to-follow and fun(!) running programmes for you and your heart.

**What kind of runner are you?**

***I’m just starting out:***

[5km training programme](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/beginners-5km-road-running)

[10km training programme](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/beginners-10km-road-running)

[21km training programme](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/beginners-21km-road-running)

***I’m okay-ish:***

[5km training programme](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/intermediate-5km-road-running)

[10km training programme](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/intermediate-10km-road-running)

[21km training programme](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/intermediate-21km-road-running)

***I’m going for gold:***

[5km training programme](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/advanced-5km-road-running)

[10km training programme](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/advanced-10km-road-running)

[21km training programme](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/advanced-21km-road-running)

Running is a safe and effective form of exercise for overall health and wellbeing. Just remember to listen to your body (and heart) to avoid injury, especially if you have joint problems or any pre-existing conditions. Always speak to your healthcare professional before engaging with physical activity.

Happy running!

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

1. WHO. Cardiovascular disease. [Link](https://www.who.int/health-topics/cardiovascular-diseases) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Women and heart disease. [Link](https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/women.htm) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. National Library of Medicine. Osteoporosis: Lifestyle strategies for risk factor reduction, prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease. [Link](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6378495/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bronson Health. Five ways running improves your heart. [Link](https://www.bronsonhealth.com/news/five-ways-running-improves-your-heart-health/) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Exercise guidelines from the American College of Sports Medicine. Physical Activity Guidelines. [Link](https://www.acsm.org/education-resources/trending-topics-resources/physical-activity-guidelines) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)