**Move more for heart health**

Did you know that the heart beats around 100 000 times a day[[1]](#footnote-1)? It works continuously without rest – the only muscle in our body to never get tired – and so taking care of it should be a priority.

Poor heart health is linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, which is the leading cause of death globally[[2]](#footnote-2). Some of the modifiable, and preventable, lifestyle factors that negatively affect heart health are poor nutrition, physical inactivity, smoking, alcohol abuse and high stress levels.

One of the best ways to keep your heart strong and healthy?

Regular physical activity.

Exercise helps to reduce the risk of heart disease, lower blood pressure, improve circulation and endurance, reduce stress levels and even improve sleep and brain function[[3]](#footnote-3). But, even with all of these benefits, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that 1 in 4 adults do not meet the global recommended levels of physical activity (which is prescribed as at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise per week).or a combination of both.

Vitality South Africa biokineticist Mari Leach says, “There is no disputing that regular physical activity is key to health at every age and especially in our later years and critical for having a healthy heart throughout your lifetime.”

Whether you want to take small steps to boost your health, or activate your inner athlete, try these exercises[[4]](#footnote-4) to keep you moving and motivated.

**Aerobic exercise**

Aerobic exercise, also known as cardiovascular exercise, is one of the best types of exercise to improve heart health. It’s any type of activity that gets your heart rate up and increases your breathing like walking, running, cycling, swimming, dancing, skipping rope and playing sports. Try do a combination of low to moderate intensity cardiovascular exercise like cycling, walking, stepper etc for a longer duration between 30 and 120 minutes, keeping your heart rate below 70% of your heart rate max, and include intervals where you push harder for shorter bouts of 20 seconds to 3 minutes with an equal, shorter or longer rest period in between (depending on your fitness level).

**Resistance training**

Resistance training, also known as strength training, may not seem like an exercise that can improve heart health, but it can. This is the use of weights or resistance bands to build muscle strength and endurance – which helps to increase heart rate, dilate the blood vessels and allow for better blood flow. Resistance training can also help reduce body fat, which can lead to improved heart health.

**Yoga and stretching**

Although not traditional cardio exercises, yoga and stretching can be beneficial for heart health as they help to reduce your stress, improves flexibility and balance, and aids with musculoskeletal health – necessary to be able to perform aerobic exercise and resistance training.

Any physical activity is better than no physical activity, so start off small. Go for a short walk and track your steps, do a parkrun or join a gym class. From there you can build up to longer and more intense workouts.

Remember that the heart is a muscle, and like any other muscle, it needs exercise to stay strong and healthy. Add : it’s also important not to exercise when you are sick to not cause damage to your heart muscle.

*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. Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. How a healthy heart works. [Link](https://www.heartandstroke.ca/heart-disease/what-is-heart-disease/how-a-healthy-heart-works) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. WHO. Cardiovascular disease. [Link](https://www.who.int/health-topics/cardiovascular-diseases#:~:text=Cardiovascular%20diseases%20(CVDs)%20are%20the,heart%20disease%20and%20other%20conditions.) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. National Library of Medicine. Exercise for prevention and relief of cardiovascular disease. [Link](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6481017/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Johns Hopkins Medicine. 3 Kinds of exercise that boost heart health. [Link](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/3-kinds-of-exercise-that-boost-heart-health) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)