

Chronic heart failure: how to stay safe when active



Aerobic, resistance, balance, and flexibility physical activities are important for those who have chronic heart failure.

- **Aerobic activities** make you breathe a little harder and begin to sweat. Aim for 150 minutes of aerobic activities each week, such as brisk walking or swimming.
- **Resistance activities** make you use your muscles to push, pull or lift. Try to do resistance activities 1 to 4 days a week.
- **Balance activities** help to keep you on your feet and reduce your risk of falling. Balance activities should be done 2 to 4 days a week.
- **Flexibility activities** lengthen and stretch muscles that are tight or restrained and can help prevent injuries and muscle and joint pain throughout the body. Flexibility activities should be done 2 to 4 days a week.

This handout for adults gives you information to help you stay safe when you are active.

Safety considerations with chronic heart failure

What is safe for you depends on the severity of your heart failure condition. Even if you can only do a small amount of exercise, it's better than not doing any exercise at all.

Have a checkup before you start an exercise program. Your doctor will likely do an electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG), and maybe an exercise stress test, to see how much activity your heart can safely handle.

Your doctor may recommend a cardiac rehabilitation (a.k.a. rehab) program at a local hospital or clinic. Rehab will give you a supervised exercise program, education, and support to help you build new healthy habits, such as exercise.

Start slowly, exercising for only a few minutes at a comfortable rate. Then each day, slowly increase the length of time and the intensity of your workout.

You can still be physically active, but you will need to follow a few safety steps.

- 1) **Stay cool.** Your medication may make it harder for your body to cool itself when you are active. Here are some tips to keep your body cool.
 - ▶ Stay hydrated. If you are on diuretics, talk with your physician about how much fluid to drink during exercise. Ask how the medication may affect your exercise.
 - ▶ Be active in the morning or evening when it is cooler (if the weather is hot or humid).
 - ▶ Decrease the intensity (i.e., how hard you push yourself) and/or the length of time you are active when the weather or workout location is hot or humid.
- 2) **Exercise indoors when needed.** Avoid exercising outdoors in extreme weather or high humidity. When the weather is very cold, hot or humid, try exercising indoors at a gym or walking at a mall.
- 3) **Avoid sudden stop-and-go exercises.**
- 4) **Do not exercise when your heart failure is not under control.**

When the weather is very cold, hot or humid, try exercising indoors.



5) **Check how you are feeling.** Although regular activity is good for you, you should not be more active when you are not feeling well. Do not exercise or increase your activities when you:

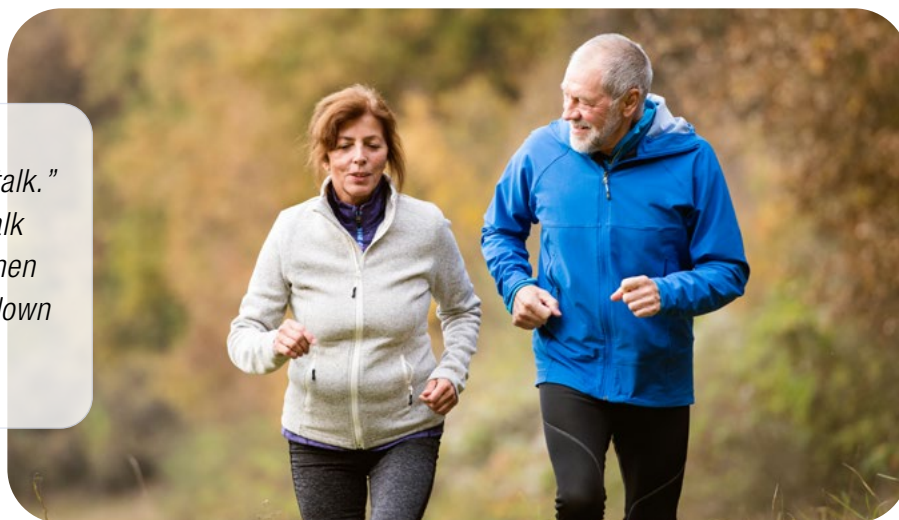
- ▶ have shortness of breath at rest or more symptoms than usual,
- ▶ feel exhausted,
- ▶ have a fever, infection, or feel ill,
- ▶ have chest pain,
- ▶ are going through a major change in your medication, or
- ▶ have persistent muscle aches or pains in the body part you are exercising.

6) **“Walk so you can talk” rule.** It is normal for patients with heart failure to feel short of breath during activity. However, they should have enough breath to carry on a conversation. If you cannot talk while exercising, then you need to slow down or rest. Always listen to your body during exercise. Stop the activity if you feel:

- ▶ short of breath while carrying on a conversation,
- ▶ weak or dizzy,
- ▶ sick to your stomach (nauseated), or
- ▶ discomfort in your chest or your heart is racing.

If you experience any discomfort, stop and rest. Sit in a comfortable chair. If these symptoms persist, call 9-1-1.

*“Walk so you can talk.”
— If you cannot talk
while exercising, then
you need to slow down
or rest.*



General Safety Tips

Here are some general safety tips to keep in mind when you are active.

- Always warm up before exercising and cool down after exercising.
- Listen to your body and take breaks as needed.
- Avoid exercises that cause you to strain, grunt or hold your breath.
- If you have not been active recently, start at a lower physical activity intensity and with shorter sessions.
- Wear your medical alert/ID bracelet.

Remember:

Physical activity can help you manage and improve your chronic heart failure. But make sure you stay safe and have fun when being physically active.

Always warm up before exercising and cool down after exercising.



Topics in this toolkit:

- A. Taking the first step: deciding to be physically active
- B. Making a physical activity plan
- C. Setting goals for physical activity
- D. What stops you from being physically active?
- E. Benefits of physical activity
- F. Physical activity and your blood pressure
- G. High blood pressure safety
- H. Physical activity and Type 2 diabetes
- I. Diabetes safety
- J. Healthy weight and physical activity
- K. Physical activity and anxiety
- L. Anxiety safety
- M. Physical activity and chronic heart failure
- N. Chronic heart failure safety
- O. Physical activity and stroke
- P. Stroke safety
- Q. Physical activity and Parkinson's Disease
- R. Parkinson's Disease safety
- S. Physical activity and dementia
- T. Dementia safety

Centre for
Active Living

www.centre4activeliving.ca