

What is Fitness?

Fitness is a combination of body composition, muscular performance and cardiovascular fitness. **Improving cardiovascular performance** increases your supply of oxygen and energy to your body. It also decreases your risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and other life threatening diseases. Cardiovascular fitness can lead to prolonged endurance and will help you perform to your best abilities. When a heart is well conditioned, it is like any other muscle – it becomes stronger and more efficient. A normal heart beats at approximately 70 beats per minute at rest, but a conditioned heart can beat as few as 40 beats per minute. A healthy heart works half as much to get the same amount of oxygen to your body.

Aerobic (means “with oxygen”) exercise, which involves steady constant motion of the muscles, increases the body's demand for oxygen. Aerobic exercise works your heart muscle, making it stronger. Examples of aerobic exercises are walking, running, swimming and cycling. Although you want the exercise to be intensive, you don't want to overdo it. The best way to monitor the amount of work you are doing is to measure your heart beat. Your target heart range (THR) is 60 to 75 percent of 220, minus your age. When exercising, take your heart beat frequently and increase your exercise to reach your target heart range. Slow down if you start to exceed it. You should discuss this with your primary care physician and cardiologist if you have a history of heart disease.

In the beginning, aim for the low end of your target heart range and as you become more fit, gradually work into the higher range. Exercise for 20 to 30 minutes, five times a week will help you become more fit.

Make Fitness a Priority

Give physical exercise the same importance as other events. Regardless of the exercise you choose, insert a 20 to 30 minute activity into your schedule five times a week. Tips to fit exercise into your schedule are:

- Walk on your lunch hour or coffee break.
- Change social activities to getting together for a softball game, bicycle ride or a walk.
- Have a business exercise session, rather than a business lunch.

Sneak Exercise into Your Daily Routine

Increasing your physical activity doesn't always mean going to the gym. Try putting it into your daily routine. You are more likely to keep doing it if you don't have to go out of your way to exercise. Some tips to improve your physical activity include:

- Park your car at the far end of the parking lot aisle and walk. At the mall, try entering the building away from your destination or make a habit of walking across the length of the shopping center before you begin shopping.
- Take stairs whenever possible – especially if you are going up or down four floors or less. Even if you work on the 60th floor, try climbing a few flights and then take the elevator to just below your floor and walk the rest of the way.
- Hand-deliver messages rather than using the phone, interoffice or e-mail. Wash your own car instead of using the car wash.
- Take your dog for a walk twice a day.
- Don't use the remote control. Get up and change the TV channel.