

# Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

## EXERCISING WITH HEART DISEASE

Exercise plays an important role in both the prevention and rehabilitation of many forms of heart disease. Exercise can have a positive influence on many of the factors that increase the risk for heart disease such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and obesity.

Coronary artery disease is the most common form of cardiovascular disease. Others include hypertension, stroke and congestive heart failure. Coronary artery disease is almost always the result of a process referred to as atherosclerosis, the formation of blockages that gradually cause the arteries that supply blood to the heart to narrow. The blockages consist primarily of fatty substances, cholesterol and calcium. If the blood flow is unable to meet the needs of the heart, people generally feel chest pressure or a dull ache, sometimes radiating up into the neck, jaw, left shoulder or arm. This type of pain is referred to as angina. Clots may form and completely close the vessel, resulting in a heart attack.

### **SO YOU HAVE CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE**

If you have been diagnosed with coronary artery disease and you want to begin an exercise program, you need to obtain guidelines and instructions from your physician or other qualified health professional. Individuals recently diagnosed with coronary artery disease are often referred to a cardiac rehabilitation program. Cardiac rehabilitation programs are available through hospitals and are staffed by trained nurses and exercise physiologists who are able to carefully monitor patients

during exercise. Many people can safely start an exercise program at home on their own. Your physician will be able to advise you as to what type of program is best for you based on your medical history and present physical condition.



### **GENERAL EXERCISE GUIDELINES**

- 1** If you recently had a heart attack or heart surgery, you must get medical clearance and guidelines from a physician before increasing your activity level.
- 2** Monitor your exercise intensity closely. Make sure to stay within your individual heart-rate zone (usually determined by a physician from a treadmill test).
- 3** Try to exercise at least three to four times per week. Individuals with low fitness levels may still benefit from five to 10 minutes of exercise, two to three times per day. Perform a gradual warm-up and cool-down of at least 10 minutes. Total exercise duration should be gradually increased to 30 to 60 minutes over a period of one to six months.

**4** Inform your physician if you have any abnormal signs or symptoms before, during or after exercise. This includes chest pain, labored breathing or extreme fatigue.

**5** If prescribed, always carry your nitroglycerin with you, especially during exercise.

**6** Never exercise to the point of chest pain or angina. If you develop chest pain during exercise, call 911 immediately.

It's never too late to increase your physical activity or start an exercise program. Get an okay and some guidelines from your physician before you start. And remember, always keep your exercise comfortable. If it's causing discomfort, slow down, you are pushing too hard.

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