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The Top 4 Exercises for the Heart

By Danielle Dowling

Exercise of any kind is beneficial. Perform these specifically for a healthy heart.

The benefits of exercise are aplenty, but the cardiovascular system is the big winner when it comes to aerobic activities such as swimming, elliptical training, rowing, and stair climbing. The following options are relatively easy forms of aerobic exercise that you can engage in without spending a whole lot of cash or stepping foot into a gym (just remember to consult your doctor before embarking on any exercise regimen):

Brisk walking. If it's been years since you've been physically active, you'll want to start slow, and walking five minutes in the morning and five minutes at night is the best beginning. Daily walks are also a good way to get some exercise if you suffer from an ailment that prevents you from more strenuous activity. According to one study, walking for just two and a half hours a week can decrease your risk of heart attack or stroke by as much as 30 percent, though many experts recommend building up to a 30-to-60-minute walk at least five times a week to enjoy optimum heart health.

Jogging. Once you're ready for greater challenge than a brisk walk provides, jogging is probably the next logical step. As with walking, you'll want to preface your run with a five-minute stretching routine. Recent research from the Stanford University School of Medicine reveals that running on a regular basis will not only benefit your heart but also push back the hands of time, allowing older joggers to remain fit and active longer than their inactive peers.

Jumping rope. It may seem like kids' stuff, but there's a reason prizefighters include skipping rope in their workout routine: It's a great way to stay fit and agile. What's more, recent research suggests that such high-impact activity is good for your bones. Jumping rope for 10 minutes melts almost 200 calories and is about the same amount of exercise as a one-mile run.

Bike-riding. Another way to add exercise to your day is to leave the car at home when running an errand and to ride a bicycle instead. An hour-long excursion on your bike burns almost 650 calories. But the best benefit of riding a bike is that it allows you to sustain an elevated heart rate over an extended period time. Experts recommend at least 20 minutes to gain the utmost potential of a workout, something that even experienced exercisers may find hard to keep up when doing other aerobic activities such as running or swimming.

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