

Exercising at Home

*A guide for people
with heart conditions*



ACPICR

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists
In Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

There are a variety of ways to exercise at home – exercise DVDs, pre-recorded and ‘live’ virtual exercise sessions on the internet, social media, and audio-visual conferencing platforms, and exercise-based ‘Apps’ available to download on mobile phones, tablets or watches. It may be that you are simply looking at using exercise equipment you already have in your house.



What are the specific benefits?

- It can be convenient and easy to fit into your usual weekly routine
- You may feel more comfortable exercising in your own home
- There are many internet-based resources and Apps that can be downloaded for free
- There is a lot of choice available. You can select the type of exercise you are interested in e.g. aerobic or cardiovascular exercise (to improve fitness), or exercise for strength, flexibility or balance. Depending on the resource there may also be different difficulty levels available e.g. beginner’s level or experienced
- You can exercise with other members of your household
- If using a ‘live’ virtual exercise class or an exercise session from a social media platform, you may be able to enjoy connecting with other people online
- If you are using an internet-based resource or an App, it may come with other helpful features such as heart rate monitoring, step count, activity diary or information pages.

When could I start?

It is recommended that you are assessed by a cardiovascular rehabilitation healthcare professional (this may be completed ‘remotely’ e.g. over the telephone or online) and inform them of the resource or equipment you wish to use. They may also recommend particular websites or Apps they feel will be most helpful for you.

When you can start exercising with the resource at home will depend on the type of exercise involved, your current level of physical fitness as well as your cardiac condition and general health.



Stop exercising if you experience any chest pain, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/or GTN spray/tablets seek medical advice as soon as possible.

People who have had a heart attack and/or a stent fitted may be able to start quite soon (one to two weeks) after their event.

People who have had heart surgery may need to wait a little longer. How long you wait will depend on your individual cardiac surgery centre, how you are recovering, and the type of exercise involved, but it may be up to six weeks post-surgery.

For some types of exercise, people who have a permanent pacemaker or implantable cardioverter device (ICD) may need to wait for six weeks after the device has been fitted. However, you can ask your cardiovascular rehabilitation team for individual advice.



How can I get started?

It may be helpful to start by **planning when you will exercise**, for example earmarking some regular slots in your diary. You are more likely to continue with regular exercise in the long term if you have some protected time for it.

If you are planning to use a pre-recorded exercise programme or 'live' virtual exercise class that will follow a similar format each session, it may be useful to **watch a session first** to help you understand how it is structured and what exercises are included.

Choose an exercise programme that includes a **warm up** component at the beginning, and a **cool down** component at the end. Think realistically about whether you will be able to complete the whole session, it is important for your heart not to skip the warm up and cool down.

Choose a resource that allows you to **adjust the pace to suit your ability**, rather than one that requires you to maintain a given pace or intensity (work level). It may be advisable to avoid exercises that involve getting up and down off the floor repeatedly as this can cause sudden changes in blood pressure.

If you are using equipment you have in the house, such as an exercise bike or rowing machine, start with the resistance set low, and choose a steady pace that you can sustain for the whole session. Aim to **gradually increase** the amount of time you exercise for each session, ensuring you incorporate a warm up at the beginning and a cool down period at the end. Your cardiovascular rehabilitation exercise professional will be able to guide you with this. You may find it helpful to read the [ACPICR Using Gym Equipment](#) leaflet, which can be found along with other advice leaflets at <http://www.acpicr.com/>



It may help to keep an **activity diary** to record what you have done and how you felt doing it. Many Apps will incorporate an activity diary into the App itself to help you keep track.

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It is beneficial for everyone to increase physical activity levels throughout the day by **breaking up prolonged periods of inactivity** and incorporating small bouts of activity into your daily routine. This could include going up and down the stairs throughout the day or having a walk around the garden.

All activity counts and something is always better than nothing. However, **building up slowly and aiming to include 150 minutes of activity or exercise a week** where you are working at a level that makes you breathe a bit heavier and feel a bit warmer (moderate intensity), is most beneficial for your overall health including your heart. It is also advisable to try to spread your activity over the course of the week if you can, so that you are active on all or most days.

What about warm up and cool down?

If you are following a pre-recorded or 'live' virtual exercise session, always choose one that incorporates a warm up at the beginning and a cool down at the end.

If you are using gym equipment that you have in the house such as an exercise bike, adjust the resistance setting to ensure the warm up and cool down periods are performed at a lower intensity, aiming towards:

Warm up:

Aim for 15 minutes, but you can adjust this if your main 'workout' section is going to be shorter, and gradually build it up as your main workout duration increases. The exercise intensity during the warm up should feel 'light'.



Aerobic workout:

This is the main 'workout' section. Aim to build this up to at least 20 minutes, working at a level that feels 'somewhat hard'. If you can comfortably manage 20 minutes, it is fine to gradually increase the duration further.

Cool down:

Aim for a minimum of 10 minutes, gradually lowering the exercise intensity until you feel completely recovered. Again, if you are starting with a shorter main 'workout' section, your cool down duration may also be shorter to begin with.

Some people choose to walk around the room for their warm up and cool down components.

If you are following a strength training only exercise programme or using strength training equipment you have at home, such as dumbbells or resistance bands, you may find the [ACPICR Strength Training](#) leaflet helpful.

How should I feel during my session?

Working comfortably at a moderate level (intensity) is recommended. You should feel your breathing rate and heart rate have increased but you should still be able to talk in a sentence and feel able to continue. Start low and go slow, build up gradually and pace yourself.



Stop exercising if you experience any chest pain, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/or GTN spray/tablets seek medical advice as soon as possible.

If you are using a resource or equipment you have used previously you may need to start at an easier level to begin with and progress gradually.

If you feel exhausted you may have worked too hard or for too long. Your cardiovascular rehabilitation team will be able to advise you on how to proceed. If you are planning to use a 'High Intensity' exercise programme, it is advisable to discuss this with your cardiovascular rehabilitation team or a healthcare professional first.

If you are using an App that incorporates a heart rate monitor, the cardiovascular rehabilitation team will be able to calculate an individual training heart rate to help guide you to exercise at the correct intensity. However, the accuracy of such heart rate monitors can vary, so it is always important to also think about how you feel during the exercise and use an appropriate exertion or effort scale as advised by the cardiovascular rehabilitation team.



Other things to consider

- Always use internet resources and Apps from a reputable source, such as the NHS, British Heart Foundation or those recommended by your cardiovascular rehabilitation team
- Try to choose a resource that will combine some aerobic exercise and some strengthening exercise
- Choose an area in the house to exercise that is a comfortable temperature, well ventilated with enough space and free from obstacles
- Make sure you have taken your medications, as prescribed, prior to exercise
- Don't exercise immediately after eating a large meal
- Remember to stay hydrated and sip water as you exercise
- Do not exercise if you feel unwell

Stop exercising if you experience any chest discomfort, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/ or your GTN spray/tablets, seek medical advice as soon as possible.

This guidance is based on available evidence and expert opinion.

Produced by the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

This leaflet is not intended to replace the advice that your doctor or cardiovascular rehabilitation team give you based on their expert knowledge of your condition.

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