

Research tells us that physical activity is good for all older people. Aerobic exercise is especially good. It helps older adults to maintain physical independence, despite the effects of chronic disease. Even people well into their nineties can improve their aerobic fitness. Older adults who are aerobically fit are likely to have a better quality of life and enjoy a longer active life expectancy.

If we lose aerobic fitness, daily tasks such as housework and gardening tire us out. When we feel strained or too tired, we stop doing these tasks. We then start to decline, becoming less fit, weaker, and even less active. When active living becomes too hard for us, we start to rely on others for help with the simple, daily tasks of living on our own.

Just what is aerobic fitness?

Aerobic fitness is a measure of how well your body can move or work for longer than two minutes. To get aerobically fit, you need to practice moving the large muscles, such as those in your legs, trunk, and shoulders. Your total activity should add up to at least 150 minutes (2½ hours) per week.

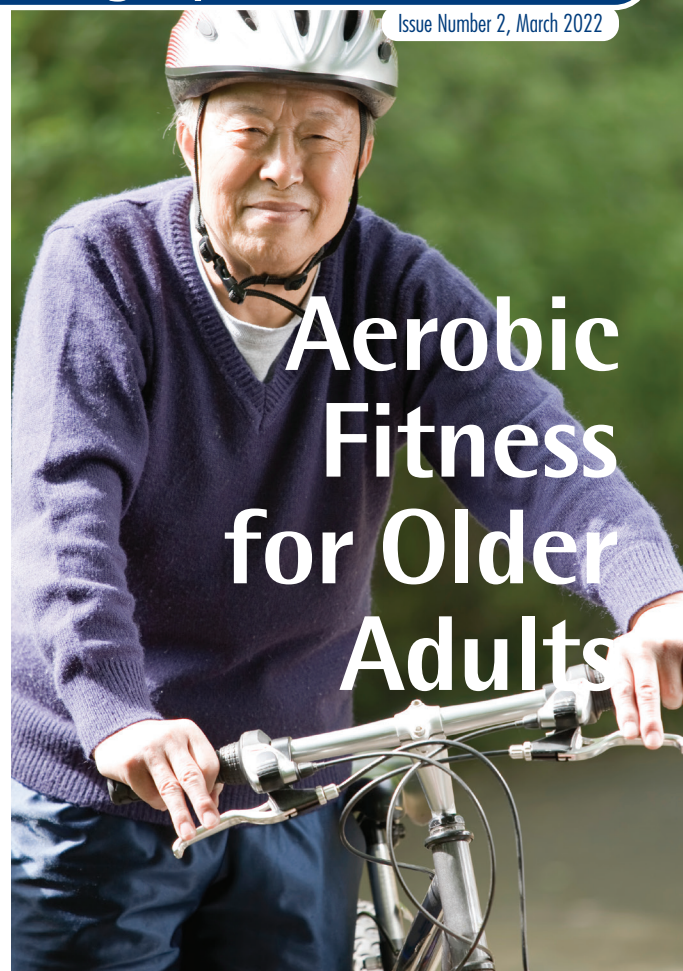
Research clearly shows that this is the minimum amount of moderate to vigorous physical activity we need to stay healthy. Doing more will give you even greater health and fitness. To learn more, download the *Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Adults (65+ years)* at <https://csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/adults-65/>.

What are some examples of aerobic exercise?

You should choose different activities to make aerobic exercise more interesting and fun. Good choices for older adults are:

- urban pole walking or mall walking
- a brisk walk around your neighborhood
- training for and taking part in a run or walk for charity
- taking up a favorite sport again
- planning active get-togethers with your family
- cycling, whether on a bicycle or a stationary exercise bike
- nature hikes
- dog walking
- rowing in a boat or on a rowing machine
- swimming or aquafit classes
- cross-country skiing or snowshoeing

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Aerobic Fitness for Older Adults

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Practical, leading edge research results applied
to physical activity for older adults.



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Active Living Tips for Older Adults

What are the benefits?

Research clearly shows that aerobic exercise:

- reduces the risk of disease
- makes daily living easier
- helps you to better manage chronic disease
- helps you to maintain an active, independent lifestyle

How do I get started?

Aerobic exercise should be an essential part of your daily routine. If you are not used to exercise, and not sure how much you can do, start by exercising for 10-15 minutes, two or three times a day. Make it add up to at least 30 minutes a day. Then, slowly increase the exercise time until it adds up to 45-60 minutes on most days.

How hard should I work?

Once you have a regular exercise routine, try picking up the pace. Make the exercise session more challenging. By exercising a little harder or quicker, you don't have to exercise for as long and you will get fitter faster.

When asked to walk 'briskly', most people choose a pace that improves aerobic fitness. Next time you walk for exercise, ask yourself, "Am I walking briskly?" or "Is this exercise challenging me?" You should notice that you are breathing harder.

How do I keep or improve my aerobic fitness?

Just keep doing regular aerobic exercise. The harder you work, the more you will improve. Make sure that the exercise you do:

- works the large muscle groups in your legs, body, and arms
- includes useful movements that you need for independent living
- includes weight-bearing activities such as brisk walking
- makes you work hard enough to be challenging yet easy enough to be enjoyable

A safe start to exercise

You can exercise safely if you start at a level that is easy for you and slowly work up to a harder level. Most people can judge this for themselves. If you are not sure, talk to your doctor about it, especially if you are new to aerobic exercise. The doctor might tell you to exercise in other ways if you are not ready for aerobic exercise.



Remember: Age does not prevent you from getting fitter. Aerobic exercise is one of the main ways you can keep yourself independent and enjoy a better quality of life.

Every little bit helps

Many older adults have health concerns such as arthritis, osteoporosis, or diabetes. Your health concerns can affect your choice of exercise. For instance, if you have an issue with your joints, that could affect your balance. You might prefer non-weight bearing exercise, such as swimming or an aquafit class. You could also try stationary cycling. You can get a bike with a back rest to help you with balance. This is called recumbent cycling.

If you can't go out, you can exercise at home by walking up and down stairs or marching in place. There is exercise equipment to help people stay fit even when they are confined to bed. Those who use walkers are still getting aerobic exercise when they walk down corridors, in malls, and so on. All exercise does you good. As you get stronger and fitter, you can do more or different exercises. This adds to the fun too and gets you even fitter.

This article was originally printed in 2011. The links and contact information have been updated, but the contents may not entirely reflect current scientific research.



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