



Exercise for Your Heart's Sake: It's Never Too Late

Heart disease is the number one killer of older men and women. That fact is unlikely to change in the near future because the population of older people is growing faster than any other age group. And among older people, heart disease is more common than any other disability except arthritis.

People used to think that only men got heart disease, but in fact it's the number one cause of death among older women. The only difference is that women develop the disease about ten years later than men do.

Can I reduce the risk of heart disease as I get older?

Yes! You can do many things right now and every day to avoid heart disease. Heart disease is a 'lifestyle disease'. How we choose to live affects our heart health.

If you choose to eat a lot of junk food, use tobacco, and spend the day sitting, your heart will be under great stress. Eventually, this unhealthy behavior will cause some part of your heart to break down.

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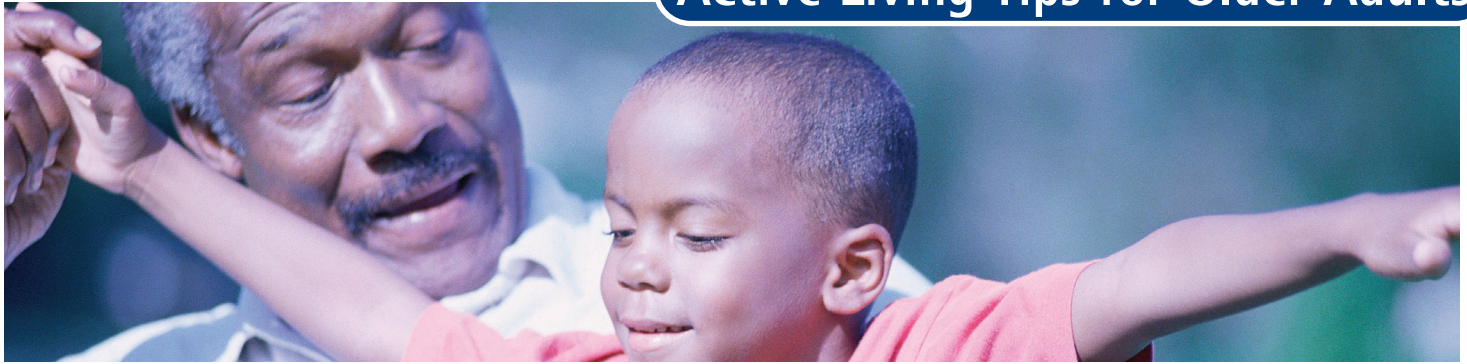
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Remembering Mike Sharratt

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The habit of being physically active over many years can help protect against heart disease. Researchers have found that being physically active can:

- lower your resting heart rate
- lower your blood pressure
- improve your fitness

Studies show that older men and women who exercise live longer and do not develop heart disease as often as people who do not exercise. In most of these studies, people were asked to walk at least 30 minutes, five times a week. Walking is considered moderate exercise.

Thirty minutes of moderate exercise on most days of the week is quite easy to manage, even for people who are not in the habit of being active. The only rule is that your heart has to beat a little faster and make you breathe a little harder. Walking more quickly than normal gives you a good idea of how hard you need to work. Think about walking quickly (not running), to reach the bus stop or an appointment on time.

Resistance exercise means giving your muscles a workout. Climbing stairs, shoveling in the garden, and carrying grocery bags are all resistance exercises. At least one major study found that people who worked at getting stronger were also less likely to develop heart disease.

You don't have to exercise for 30 minutes without stopping. You could go for a 10-minute walk, three times a day. It does not matter what kind of exercise or physical activity you choose. You can swim, ride a bike, walk your dog, or dig and weed in your garden. Whatever you choose to do, make sure that you enjoy it; that way, you are more likely to do it every day.

If you want to get more active, a good place to start is by reading the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Adults (65+ years) at <https://csepguidelines.ca/>.

**I have not exercised regularly for a long time.
Should I check with my doctor first?**

Yes. If you haven't been exercising regularly, talk to your doctor before you start working towards 30 minutes of exercise, five days per week. It's especially important to talk to your doctor if you are already living with heart disease.

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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