

Cardiovascular rehabilitation

Physical activity and exercise

A supplementary booklet for your
cardiovascular rehabilitation programme

Introduction

This booklet will help you to get the most benefit from the exercise component of your cardiovascular rehabilitation programme.

It is normal to feel a little bit anxious about exercise after a hospital admission or new diagnosis. The aim of the exercise component of cardiovascular rehabilitation is to help you regain confidence and physical fitness. This will enable you to safely maintain a good level of physical activity when the programme has finished.

What are physical activity and exercise?

Physical activity is any movement that makes your heart and lungs work a bit harder. It will make you breathe deeper and faster, make your heart beat faster and may cause you to break into a bit of a sweat.

Exercise is physical activity that is structured and purposeful. Exercise that can benefit your health may include brisk walking, cycling, dancing, swimming, tennis, aerobics or badminton.

Making changes to your lifestyle to increase your general physical activity is as important as structured exercise. Such changes might include:

- taking the stairs instead of the lift
- walking instead of driving short journeys
- getting off the bus one stop early and walking the rest of the way
- washing the car instead of taking it to the garage
- doing more gardening or housework.

Why is it important to exercise?

Regular exercise can:

- increase the efficiency of your heart and lungs
- lower your resting blood pressure
- help to increase levels of good cholesterol and therefore lower your total cholesterol levels
- reduce the risk of developing diabetes
- improve blood sugar control for diabetics
- increase muscle strength and joint suppleness
- increase confidence and feeling of well-being
- reduce the risk of osteoporosis (brittle bone disease)
- help you cope with stress
- help to maintain the right weight for you.

To get the most benefit from exercise you should do something active five times a week. To maintain fitness, the length of exercise needs to be a minimum of 30 minutes at a time (or can be split into two 15-minute sessions or three 10-minute sessions). If you are physically active less than three times a week your level of fitness will drop. If you are currently not able to exercise for this duration currently, you should start by doing just a few minutes a day and then build up gradually.

When you are attending twice-weekly cardiovascular rehabilitation classes, try to do something active at least three other days in the week.

Most importantly, exercise should be fun, so choose types of exercise that you like. If you find it hard to motivate yourself, find someone to exercise with you – you will find it easier to get into a routine and can encourage each other.

How will I know that the exercise is working for me?

You will find that over a short period of time (weeks rather than months) you will be able to exercise for longer periods of time and/or more intensely.

A great way of seeing how far you have progressed over the weeks is to keep an exercise diary. This is simply a record of what exercise you have done, how long you did it for, and how you felt whilst you were doing it. Over time, you will be able to see how your fitness has improved and progressed.

On the next few pages there is an exercise diary for you to use during your cardiovascular rehabilitation programme. Simply fill in the diary at the end of each day, after you have exercised. You may find it helpful to bring it to some sessions to discuss with the physiotherapist.

If you find it useful, adapt it to suit you and your exercise regime.

How to progress and monitor your exercise

On the next page there is a scale with which you can rate how hard you are finding any physical activity. Your physiotherapist will explain how to properly use this scale. You should aim for a peak exertion of around 12–13 on this scale to get the most health benefits. You do not need to exercise above this level, and will probably find it difficult to maintain exercise more vigorous than this for long enough to achieve health benefits.

Perception of exertion scale

6	No exertion at all
7	
	Extremely light
8	
9	Very light
10	
11	Light
12	
13	Somewhat hard
14	
15	Hard (heavy)
16	
17	Very hard
18	
19	Extremely hard
20	Maximal exertion

Borg RPE scale ©Gunnar Borg, 1970, 1985, 1984, 1998

Dos and don'ts of exercise and physical activity

Do:

- Exercise regularly and consistently – fitness is hard to gain, but easily lost.
- Warm up first – start any physical activity gradually. This will prepare your body for being active and reduce the risk of injury.
- Cool down afterwards – keep your feet moving until your breathing is comfortable. This lets your heart rate and blood pressure come back to a resting state gradually, and prevents you from feeling dizzy or unwell.
- Start gently and build up.
- Exercise within your own limits.

Don't:

- Exercise vigorously for at least one hour after a meal.
- Exercise if feeling excessively tired or unwell.
- Continue to exercise if you experience chest pain, nausea, dizziness, unusual joint pain, marked breathlessness, or if you become cold and clammy.

Exercise Diary	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Monday	Walked 20 mins. 12 on exertion scale.		
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

Exercise Diary	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Monday	Walked 30 mins. 13 on exertion scale.		
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

[illegible]

[illegible]

Further sources of information

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns, please call the cardiovascular rehabilitation team on **020 7188 0946**, between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Pharmacy medicines helpline

For information about any medicines that you have been prescribed at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals, you can speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)

For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

t: 020 7188 3416

Language support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future

Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years.

To join, please:

call 0848 143 4017

email members@gstt.nhs.uk

visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk

Leaflet number: 3599/VER2

Date published: December 2015

Review date: December 2018

© 2015 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust