

Exercise for People with a Ventricular Assist Device (VAD)

There are many benefits to exercise after VAD placement. Exercise helps you heal. It makes your heart pump more blood and oxygen to your muscles. It also lowers the risk of blood clots and lung infections, helps your lungs work better, and boosts your energy and fitness.

Benefits

There are many benefits to exercise. It can:

- Improve your physical fitness and increases energy.
- Lower your cholesterol, triglycerides (fats) and LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels.
- Increase your HDL (“good”) cholesterol levels.
- Lower blood pressure.
- Decrease your risk of getting diabetes.
- Lower blood sugar levels if you have diabetes or pre-diabetes.
- Helps manage weight.
- Reduce risk of osteoporosis, colon cancer, breast cancer, stroke, and dementia.
- Decrease stress and improve your mood.
- Help you maintain your independence and keep you healthy as you age.
- Improve sleep.
- Improve digestion and constipation.

Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise is planned, repeated movement of your arms or legs for at least 10 minutes at a time for a total of 150 minutes a week. Examples include:

- Walking
- Biking
- Seated marching
- Dancing

Aerobic exercise does not include:

- Gardening or yardwork
- Walking upstairs
- Household duties
- Any activities of daily living

Weight Training

Weight training makes muscles stronger by working against resistance. Talk with your cardiac rehab team about weight training when your surgical restrictions are over.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 2/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6163

♥ What type of exercise should I do?	Some examples of exercise include: • Walking on a level surface • Using a stationary bike or treadmill • Marching while sitting in a chair
♥ How often should I exercise?	Most days of the week (5-7 days).
♥ How long should I exercise?	Start with ____ minutes of exercise, ____ times a day. Build up to at least 10 minutes, 3 times a day. To reap the benefits of exercise listed above, build up to at least 150 minutes a week of aerobic exercise.
♥ How do I increase exercise?	Add 1-2 minutes to each session every day. As you add time, decrease the number of times you walk or bike per day. For example: • At 10 minutes, decrease to 3 times a day. • At 15 minutes, decrease to 2 times a day. • At 20 minutes, decrease to 1 time per day. Keep adding 1-2 minutes a day until you reach 30 minutes of exercise, 1 time per day. At 30 minutes, add a 5-minute warm-up and cool down. • Start with 5 minutes of slow walking or biking. • Increase to a moderate intensity using the Talk Test for 30 minutes. • End with 5 minutes of slow walking or biking.
♥ How hard should I work?	How you feel should guide how long and hard you exercise. Some heart medicines slow your heart rate, so do not use heart rate to measure effort. Use the Talk Test instead. Pick a speed that lets you talk while you exercise. You should be able to speak in short sentences but not sing. You should not feel short of breath. If you cannot talk, slow down.
♥ When should I stop exercising?	You should avoid exercise if: • Your VAD flow is different than your “normal” flow rate. • Your temperature is greater than 100°F. • You are feeling faint or have a headache. • You are short of breath. • You have chest pain or pressure. • You have a pulsatile VAD, and your systolic blood pressure (top number) is greater than 150 mmHg or less than 80 mmHg. • You have a non-pulsatile VAD and your mean arterial blood pressure is greater than 90.

♥ Restrictions	• Do not lift, push, or pull more than 10 pounds. • Avoid any arm motion that causes pain in your incision. • Do not drive until your doctor tells you otherwise. • Do not bend at the waist or do things that may cause your drive line to kink or bend. • Keep your arms close to your body (“in the tube”) during exercise. • Avoid exercising in extreme cold temperatures (below zero with the wind chill) or extreme hot temperatures (above 85 with humidity). • Do not exercise outside if ice or snow are on the ground.
♥ Symptoms	If you have any of these symptoms, you should STOP exercising and call your heart doctor. If you feel that it is an emergency, call 911 right away. • Chest pain (angina) • Frequent skipped beats • Excessive shortness of breath • Feeling faint or dizzy • Excessive sweating • Blurred vision • Nausea • Cramping in your arms or legs • Headache • New weakness on one side of your body, either an arm or leg or both • ICD shock (if you have an ICD) If symptoms persist or become worse, call 911 and then call your VAD coordinator. If 911 is not available in your area, what number would you call?