

Aerobic exercise recommendations

The Canadian physical activity guidelines recommend a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise per week. Moderate to vigorous exercise would feel like:

- Heartbeat is elevated
- Breathing harder than usual
- Muscles are working hard

If you feel a lot of discomfort, shortness of breath, pain in the chest or arms, joint pain, or lightheadedness, or have frequent low blood sugars, please stop the activity and reach out to your health care provider.

If you're not ready or able to do moderate to vigorous exercise, start with light activities and work your way up to increasing the intensity for small amounts of time.

Watch how much time you spend sitting (sedentary time) and the amount of quality sleep you get. These all help improve your health.



Aerobic exercise is continuous, repetitive movement that raises your heart rate and breathing.

When you exercise, your heart beats faster in a controlled way. This can help lower your blood pressure. It also helps your muscles use the sugar (glucose) in your blood. Aerobic and resistance exercise together help to prevent complications of diabetes such as heart disease and stroke.

Measuring your intensity

It's important to notice how challenging the aerobic exercise is while you are doing it. With aerobic exercise, your breathing, heartbeat and muscles will be working harder than when you're not exercising. To measure the intensity of your activity, take note of your heartbeat, breathing and working muscles as referenced below.

Measure	Low intensity	Moderate intensity	Vigorous intensity
Heartbeat	Slightly increased	Increased	Rapid
Breathing	Sing along with music	Talk but not sing	Difficult to talk
Muscles	Mildly engaged	Muscles fully engaged	Muscles tired, burning
Activity	Light walking, golf, gardening, dusting or sweeping, laundry, stretching, yoga, curling, bowling	Brisk walking, climbing stairs, mowing the lawn, shoveling, swimming, dancing, biking	Running, fast cycling, spin classes, hockey, basketball, circuit and high intensity training, step classes

Regular exercise

By doing regular exercise, you have already taken an important step in managing your diabetes. Keep exercising every week to help manage your diabetes.

NOTE: Exercise may change how your medications work for you. Make sure you test your blood sugar regularly. Speak with your diabetes care provider if you notice any differences in your regular blood sugar pattern.

Start with a simple walking plan

If you are new to regular exercise, a walking plan may be a good place to start. Follow the plan here to gradually increase your frequency, intensity and walking time. Using a step monitor (e.g. pedometer) can be helpful in tracking your exercise. Diabetes Canada recommends a total of at least 150 minutes of aerobic exercise a week.

Walking Plan Progression

Program Stage	Week	Frequency (days/week)	Exertion Level	Duration (min)
Initial stage	1	2	Light	10
	2	2	Light	10 - 15
	3	2 - 3	Moderate	15
	4	3	Moderate	15
Improvement	5 - 7	3 - 4	Moderate - Somewhat hard	15 - 20
	8 - 10	4	Moderate - Somewhat hard	20
	11 - 13	4	Somewhat hard	20 - 25
	14 - 16	4	Somewhat hard	25
	17 - 20	4	Somewhat hard	25 - 30
	21 - 24	4 - 5	Somewhat hard - Hard	25 - 30
Maintenance	25 +	3 - 5 +	Moderate - Hard	30+

Table adapted from: Warburton, et al. 2006

Start at the improvement stage if you are somewhat active and have no medical limitations. If walking is difficult for you, your diabetes care provider can help you come up with some different physical activity options.

Advanced aerobic progression

As you get used to exercising more regularly, you may want to progress and increase your intensity. Follow the plan here to continue to increase your frequency, intensity, and walking time or to add other aerobic exercise to improve your cardiovascular fitness. Try to include aerobic exercise at least every other day.

Program Stage	Week	Frequency (days/week)	Exertion Level	Duration (min)
Improvement	1 - 4	2	Somewhat hard	25 - 30
	5 - 7	2	Somewhat hard	30 - 35
	8 - 10	2 - 3	Somewhat hard	35 - 40
	11 - 13	3	Somewhat hard - Hard	40 - 45
	14 - 16	3 - 4	Somewhat hard - Hard	45 - 50
	17 - 20	4	Hard	50 - 55
	21 - 24	4	Hard	55 - 60
Maintenance	25+	4	Moderate - Hard	30 - 60

Table adapted from: Warburton, et al. 2006

For more information, talk to your health-care team or visit diabetes.ca

References: Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology Guidelines



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