

Exercising With a Heart Condition

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Science has proven that daily exercise helps maintain a healthy body weight, lowers blood pressure and slows the aging process. Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, and recent research also shows this may decrease incidence of or delay the onset of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Exercise also helps those who have recently experienced a heart attack or who have had open heart surgery regain their stamina and endurance. For years, patients with heart conditions, such as cardiac arrhythmias (or irregular heartbeats), believed they were unable to exercise, but in many cases, this is no longer true. Many physicians now refer patients to cardiac rehabilitation programs, like at Eisenhower Renker Wellness Center, to establish a regular exercise program to get them in step for a healthier life.

COMMON CONDITIONS

Most adults experience some type of cardiac arrhythmia at some point in life as a result of too much caffeine, stress, or nicotine. Arrhythmias tend to be transient and disappear with rest or resumption of a healthy lifestyle. Some arrhythmias require treatment with medications, an electrophysiological procedure or an implantable cardiac defibrillator. Until recently, patients diagnosed with atrial fibrillation, the most common type of arrhythmia, rarely participated in exercise programs. Physicians and patients are now aware that when monitored appropriately, these patients are able to exercise regularly and enjoy the many benefits.

WATCHFUL WORKOUTS

Anyone with an arrhythmia should begin an exercise program in a facility where cardiac rehabilitation specialists and heart rate and blood pressure monitoring are readily available. With physician approval to begin an exercise program, seek out a facility and ask if the staff is trained for cardiac emergencies. For people who have a heart condition, feeling safe to exercise is a vital component of reaching exercise goals. Trained nurses and exercise clinicians will develop an exercise program based on your medical history and exercise capabilities, establishing a beneficial exercise program that will improve stamina and build strength while still providing the assurance that the heart muscle is being exercised correctly and safely.

An exercise program developed by a cardiac rehabilitation specialist builds slowly in intensity to provide for the gradual strengthening of the heart muscle, making sure not to irritate the heart or cause more arrhythmias. With guidance, an individual can exercise more and experience fewer symptoms related to the heart condition over time. In addition to building strength, a well developed exercise routine will build confidence and independence that may be shaken after diagnosis of a heart condition.

If you are unable to exercise in a facility with cardiac rehabilitation specialists, remember to start slowly and gradually. A regular exercise program should be established over the course of several months. Check your heart rate frequently, particularly if you are unable to recognize symptoms of an irregular heart beat or rate. Many sporting good stores sell heart rate monitors that can be used to check your heart rate while exercising. Remember to monitor your breathing; you should be able to talk and walk without feeling out of breath.

People with cardiac arrhythmias and many other heart conditions do not have to resign themselves to a life of inactivity. Curbing behaviors that may result in arrhythmias and developing a safe, healthy exercise program will lead to a happy, active and productive life.

For more information about exercise, the Eisenhower Renker Wellness Center or finding a personal trainer, contact the Eisenhower Renker Wellness Center at 760-773-2030.