

# How exercise helps you avoid a broken heart

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Joseph Libonati, PhD, associate professor of nursing at Penn Nursing answer's questions about how exercise betters your heart health. Dr. Libonati is a cardiac physiology expert who focuses on heart health and hypertension.

## Exactly how does exercise benefit the heart?

One way [exercise](#) benefits the heart is by decreasing its workload. Exercise improves the ratio between the heart's demand for oxygen and its supply through the coronary arteries. With exercise, the heart gets stronger because it gets bigger and is able to pump more efficiently.

Exercise allows your heart to push out a greater volume of blood with every beat and it does so at a lower heart rate. It also improves the blood flow to the heart by improving the heart's ability to have its coronary blood vessels dilate. These changes in parallel improve both the supply and demand of the heart.

## How does exercise lower high blood pressure?

Exercise helps lower high blood pressure by improving the ability of your blood vessels to dilate, making the pressure on those vessels less. Exercise also improves your blood sugar levels and makes you leaner; this allows your heart to pump blood at lower pressures, thereby making your heart work less.

## What exercise is best for the heart?

Using large muscle mass repetitively is best for heart health. Think about the acronym FIT:

F – Frequency  
I – Intensity  
T - Time

That's the general recipe for exercise toward a healthy [heart](#). For frequency: You should exercise

five days a week. Find something you like so you are more likely to stick with it. For intensity: You should do the talk test. If you can hold a normal conversation with little breathing trouble while exercising, this is the right intensity. For time: You should exercise 30 to 60 minutes per day, and it doesn't have to be all at once. The important factor is that you do as much physical activity as you can throughout the day.

## Why is exercise important as we age?

Exercise is important to maintaining healthy bones and muscles. As we age, we start to have smaller muscles and weaker bones. Activities that maintain muscles and bone mass help people age with a greater ability to function.

Resistance training or weight training is a good way to maintain bone mass, so making this type of exercise part of your daily routine is important as into your 40s and beyond. Also, maintaining muscle mass helps the body's metabolism and can reduce the risk of obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

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