

Pump up your cardio!

Cardiovascular exercise, also known as “cardio,” is any physical activity that noticeably raises your breathing and heart rate. These exercises can be done over long periods of time (“steady-state cardio”) or in intense bursts of exercise (“HIIT” – high-intensity interval training).

Incorporating cardio into your daily routine can significantly improve your overall health and well-being. Examples of cardio activity include walking, running, cycling, skiing, rowing, hiking and dancing. To stay fit and healthy, aim for 150 minutes or more of cardio exercise each week.

If you are short on time, you may consider HIIT training since it can be done in 10 minutes or less. You can use HIIT with any type of cardio workout. You’ll work at a very intense level and then back off for a slower recovery period, followed by another round of high intensity. Try 20 seconds of high-intensity exercise followed by a 10 second rest for four minutes. Your body will then burn calories for about two hours after you finish.

Among the reasons why cardio activity is so important include:

- **Boosting your mental health.** Engaging in regular cardio exercise stimulates the release of feel-good hormones called endorphins. This can help reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. When your heart beats faster, it induces good blood flow to the brain and delivers all the nutrients required to carry out the brain’s job. Cardiovascular activities have also been shown to boost memory, learning and cognitive performance.
- **Strengthening your heart and lungs.** When you move your body enough to feel your heart rate speed up and breathing increase, you are in the aerobic phase of exercise. While in this phase, your heart is working harder, which strengthens the cardiac muscle over time. A stronger heart means you don’t have to work as hard doing daily activities. In addition, cardio activity improves your lung function, which increases oxygen delivery throughout the body.
- **Helping with weight loss.** Cardio exercise burns calories, regulates appetite-related hormones and reduces body fat percentage, which is key for achieving a leaner physique and lowering your risk of obesity-related conditions. The amount of cardio you need to do to lose weight depends on various factors, including your age, weight and diet.

The benefits don’t end there. Regular cardio activity can help improve insulin sensitivity, lower blood sugar levels and reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. It also helps regulate cholesterol by increasing HDL (good cholesterol) and lowering LDL (bad cholesterol). Plus, adding cardio into your daily routine can lead to a great night’s sleep.