

Stepping up to HCM

Exercise should be a key part of managing hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) for most people

To exercise or not to exercise? It's a question many people with HCM grapple with, often faced with conflicting information about how and if they should exercise at all. Some were told to stop any level of activity or exertion when they were diagnosed. Others have avoided it fearing sudden cardiac arrest. But sudden death rarely happens during exercise, despite reports that attract a lot of attention about young athletes dying while playing competitive sports.

Mounting evidence shows that exercise is good for patients with HCM, helping to improve their ability to do daily activities and quality of life. The American College of Cardiology and American Heart Association now recommend mild-to-moderate intensity physical activity for most patients after talking with their health care team.

The many benefits of exercise

In studies, people with HCM who engaged in moderate exercise had better quality of life overall.

If you have HCM, you can still develop other types of heart disease, which are much more likely if you are inactive. But being active isn't just good for the heart. Exercise can also help:

- Control your weight
- Strengthen your bones, muscles and general fitness level
- Boost your mental outlook and energy level
- Promote better sleep
- Prevent other health problems, such as type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, depression, sleep apnea, or falls



Coming up with an exercise plan for you

What does mild-to-moderate intensity exercise really mean?

Everyone with HCM is different, so there isn't a one-size-fits-all exercise program. The types of activities – and exertion level – that feel good for one person might not work for another. Exercise recommendations will also vary based on someone's age, fitness level, and how HCM affects them.

Your care team may want you to do a stress test before you start an exercise program. This allows them to see how your heart responds to exercise, usually on a treadmill, in the clinic.

The best thing you can do is to talk with your care team and create an exercise plan just for you. Not only will this help you meet your goals for being active, but it will also give you the self-confidence to stick with it and likely ease any worries you have.

Use the *HCM Exercise Planning Worksheet* to let your care team know what you are currently doing and to create an exercise plan just for you.

Building your plan



Understand your risk

Your care team will discuss this with you.



Ask what activities you should focus on

What types of exercises are best will depend on your HCM, symptoms, age, fitness level, goals, and any other health conditions.



Listen to your body during exercise and ease up or rest if you need to

With moderate-intensity exercise, you should be breathing harder than usual, but still be able to carry on a conversation.

Always be sure to take time to warm up and cool down.

Examples of low- to moderate-intensity exercise



Walking



Jogging



Biking



Swimming



Dancing



Aerobics
classes



Cardio machines
(for example,
elliptical, rowing)



Golf



Doubles
tennis



Household
chores

Talk with your care team about activities you like and that would be best for you. Strenuous, high-intensity exercise or competitive sports for people with HCM can also be considered on an individual basis following an in-depth discussion with an expert in HCM.

Key points to remember

- **Light- to moderate-intensity leisure activities are recommended for most patients with HCM.** High-intensity exercise and competitive sports can be considered on an individual basis after talking with an expert in HCM.
- **Sudden death is a rare occurrence** and exercise does not seem to increase the risk.
- **Estimating your chance (risk) of having a dangerous heart rhythm is part of overall HCM care** and will be factored into exercise recommendations.
- **Exercise helps most people with HCM feel better** and helps prevent other health problems that come with being inactive and gaining weight.
 - Not exercising may be trading one potential risk for many others. One study found 7 out of 10 of individuals with HCM were obese or nearing obesity, which is linked to many health issues.
- **Many patients are anxious or hesitant about being physically active** because they fear pushing their heart too hard or don't have enough information about what types of exercise and exertion levels are good for them. Talk openly with your care team about coming up with a plan.

Talk with your care team so they can help you find an exercise program that you enjoy and feel confident doing. You can be active – with the help and close watch of your care team.



Questions to ask

Ask questions and talk openly about barriers to getting exercise – even if it's because you are scared.

- What are examples of moderate-intensity exercises?
- What types of activities are best for me to do?
- Are there activities that I should avoid?
- What about lifting weights or carrying heavy things?
- How many days of the week should I be physically active? For what length of time?
- How will I know if I'm pushing myself too hard? What symptoms should I watch out for that should prompt me to slow down or stop?
- How can I tell whether my symptoms are due to my HCM or generally being out of shape because I've largely avoided being active?
- If I have an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD), should I be worried about getting shocked?
- Should I have a workout buddy?
- Do I need to pay attention to my heart rate or use a pulse oximeter to measure my heart rate or blood-oxygen levels?
- Do I need to be careful about exercising in hot weather?
- Is it OK for me to travel far away from home? What precautions should I take and how should I prepare? What about high altitudes?

As our understanding of HCM has evolved, we now know that being inactive – not exercising – can be more harmful than helpful. Be sure to talk with your care team to develop an exercise plan tailored to you.