

# February is American Heart Month

## Q&A for Heart Disease Awareness

### **If I exercise, will I prevent heart disease?**

Physical inactivity, along with cigarette smoking, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol, is one of the major modifiable risk factors for heart attacks. There is no guarantee that you won't get heart disease, but you'll reduce your chance of heart disease if you avoid the risk factors.

### **I have been inactive for years. Shouldn't I see a doctor before I start becoming physically active?**

People middle-aged or older who are inactive and at high risk for heart disease (or who already have a medical condition) should seek medical advice before they start or significantly increase their physical activity. Most apparently healthy people of any age can safely engage in moderate levels of physical activity (e.g., moderate walking, gardening, yard work) without consulting a doctor first.

### **How much physical activity is enough?**

If you're inactive, doing anything is better than nothing! Studies show that people who have a low fitness level are much more likely to die early than people who have achieved even a moderate level of fitness. If you want to exceed a moderate level of fitness, you need to exercise for 30 - 60 minutes, on most days of the week, at 50 - 80 percent of your maximum capacity.

### **Is exercise safe?**

The potential health benefits of exercise greatly outweigh the risk, although there is a very slight increased risk of death due to heart attack during vigorous exercise. Consult your doctor first if you have any concerns, have been sedentary, are overweight, are middle-aged or older or have a medical condition.

### **Do I need to do vigorous exercise?**

To achieve health benefits, no. Doing moderate-level activities often will help lower your health risks. If you want to attain a high level of cardiovascular fitness, you need to gradually work up to exercising on most days of the week for 30 - 60 minutes at 50 - 80 percent of your maximum capacity.

### **Does exercise counteract the harmful effects of other risk factors?**

Studies show that being physically fit lowers heart disease risk even in people who have other health problems such as high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. To minimize risk, however, you should be physically fit and avoid the other major risk factors you can do something about: cigarette smoke, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and overweight.

### **Do women get the same benefits from exercise as men?**

Most studies showing the positive effects of exercise have been done with men. The few studies that have included women have indicated that women may benefit even more than men from being physically fit. Early indications show that physically fit women enjoy even greater reduced rates of death from heart disease than men.

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Answers provided by Lee Grandison, Wellness Director. If you have any questions, please contact her at (757) 722-9044 Ext. 217 or by email at [lee.grandison@peninsulaymca.org](mailto:lee.grandison@peninsulaymca.org). You can also visit [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org) to view the questions provided and for additional information on becoming more heart healthy.

