



# EXERCISE AND HIV

## WHY IS EXERCISE IMPORTANT?

Exercise cannot control or fight HIV disease, but it may help you feel better and fight many of the side effects of HIV disease and HIV medications.

## WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF EXERCISE?

Regular, moderate exercise has many of the same advantages for people with HIV disease as it does for most people. Exercise can:

- Improve muscle mass, strength and endurance
- Improve heart and lung endurance
- Improve your energy level so you feel less tired
- Reduce stress
- Enhance your sense of well-being.
- Help stabilize or prevent declines in CD4 cell counts. See Fact Sheet 124 for more information on CD4 cells.
- Increase bone strength
- Decrease cholesterol and triglycerides (see fact sheet 123)
- Decrease fat in the abdomen
- Improve appetite
- Improve sleep
- Improve the way the body uses and controls blood sugar (glucose)

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF EXERCISE?

- You can get dehydrated (lose too much water) if you do not drink enough liquids to keep up your fluid levels.
- Injuries may take more time to heal.
- You can lose lean body mass if you exercise too much. Serious cases can lead to AIDS wasting (see fact sheet 519).
- You can injure yourself if you use the wrong "form" in exercises.
- Exercise can help those with heart disease, but talk to your doctor to make sure that you are able to exercise safely!

## EXERCISE GUIDELINES FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV

### Don't Overdo It!

A moderate exercise program will help your body turn your food into muscle. Take it easy, and work exercise into your daily activities.

Work up to a schedule of at least 20 minutes, at least three times per week as long as you are feeling better. This can lead to significant improvements in your fitness level and you may feel better. As your strength and energy increase, try to aim at 45 minutes to an hour, three to four times a week.

People with HIV can improve their fitness levels through training like those who do not have HIV. However, people with HIV may find it harder to continue with a training program because of fatigue (see Fact Sheet 551) and pain in the feet (neuropathy, see Fact Sheet 555)

Start exercising while you are still healthy. This can help you hold off symptoms of HIV that make you feel bad. Vary your exercise routine so that you do not get bored. Find new ways to keep yourself motivated to maintain your exercise program. Find a friend who can become your "exercise buddy."

Your fitness level may be different than it used to be. It is very important that you work your way into an exercise program to avoid injury. Starting with 10 minute sessions is good enough until you build up to an hour.

### Eat and Drink Correctly

Drinking enough **liquids** is very important when you exercise. Extra water can help you replace the fluids you lose. Remember that drinking tea, coffee, colas, chocolate, or alcohol can actually make you lose body liquid.

Don't eat when you exercise. In fact, it's best to wait up to 2 hours after a full meal before an exercise session. Also, wait about an hour after a workout before you eat your next meal. Having a small snack like an apple or small peanut butter sandwich on multigrain bread before working out can provide you with a boost in energy.

Proper **nutrition** is also important. With increased activity, you may need to eat more calories to avoid losing weight.

### Choose Something You Enjoy

Choose activities that you like. Whether it is yoga, running, bicycling, or another sport, doing something you like will encourage you to maintain your program. Don't get into a rut! Change your activities if you need to so that you stay motivated.

If your fitness level is good, you can compete in competitive sports. Taking part

in competitive or team sports does not pose a risk of spreading HIV to other athletes or coaches.

If you get hurt and you're bleeding, the risk of HIV being spread to other people is very small. However, if you bleed during a sport, you should get out of the game and cover your injuries before returning to the game.

### Exercise with Weights

Weight training (resistance exercise) is one of the best ways to increase lean body mass that may be lost through HIV disease and aging. Working out three times a week for an hour should be enough if done well. Combining weight training with 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise may be the best way to improve body composition and keep your blood lipids and sugar down. Cardiovascular exercise means working large muscle groups continuously for at least 30 minutes. Activities such as brisk walking, jogging, bicycling or swimming can be cardiovascular exercise.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

Exercise can improve strength, fight fatigue and depression, improve endurance, increase cardiovascular fitness, help to reduce stress and promote muscle strength. It may also help the immune system work better.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

You can get more information on exercise and HIV from the following:

AIDS and Exercise, from the American Council on Fitness, at [http://www.acefitness.org/fitfacts/pdfs/fitfacts/itemid\\_63.pdf](http://www.acefitness.org/fitfacts/pdfs/fitfacts/itemid_63.pdf)

Exercise: The Best Therapy for Managing Side Effects, at [http://positivelyaware.com/2009/09\\_05/exercise.shtml](http://positivelyaware.com/2009/09_05/exercise.shtml)

HIV: Nutrition and Exercise When You Have HIV, at <http://familydoctor.org/x2066.xml>

HIV and Exercise: [http://www.thebody.com/tpan/julaug\\_02/exercise.html](http://www.thebody.com/tpan/julaug_02/exercise.html)

Medibolics web site: <http://www.medibolics.com/exercise.html>

Ten Things You Can Do to Improve Your Physical Fitness: <http://www.thebody.com/bp/10things/fitness.html>

**Reviewed February 12, 2011**