

The HG Cardiowise Digest

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Exercise is one of the most recommended — and most misunderstood — aspects of heart health. Some people feel they are not doing enough. Others worry they may be overdoing it. And many are unsure where to even begin.

In this edition, we simplify the question: How much exercise is actually enough for your heart? Not for performance. Not for extremes. But for long-term cardiovascular health. Because when it comes to exercise, more is not always better — but the right amount, done consistently, can be one of the most powerful forms of prevention.

Dr. Ameya Amonkar | Cardiologist & Founder, HG Cardiowise

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Exercise: Finding the Right Dose

Why More Is Not Always Better for the Heart

Exercise is one of the most powerful tools we have to protect the heart. And yet, it is also one of the most misunderstood. Some

people worry they are not exercising enough. Others believe they must constantly push harder, train longer, and exhaust themselves to stay healthy. Modern fitness culture often celebrates extremes. The harder the workout, the better the result. The more exhausted you feel, the more effective it

must have been. But the heart does not always work that way. In cardiology, exercise is not simply about effort. It is about dose.

The Bell Curve of Benefit

Exercise does not improve health in a straight line. In fact, cardiovascular benefit often follows what we call a bell-shaped curve. At one end lies inactivity — where the risk of diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and heart disease steadily rises. As activity increases, cardiovascular

protection improves significantly. But beyond a certain point, the benefits begin to plateau. For some individuals, excessive or poorly planned high-intensity exercise may even create unnecessary strain. This does not mean intense exercise is “bad.” It means there is always a ceiling beyond which more effort does not necessarily translate into more protection. And for most people, that ceiling is reached much earlier than they think

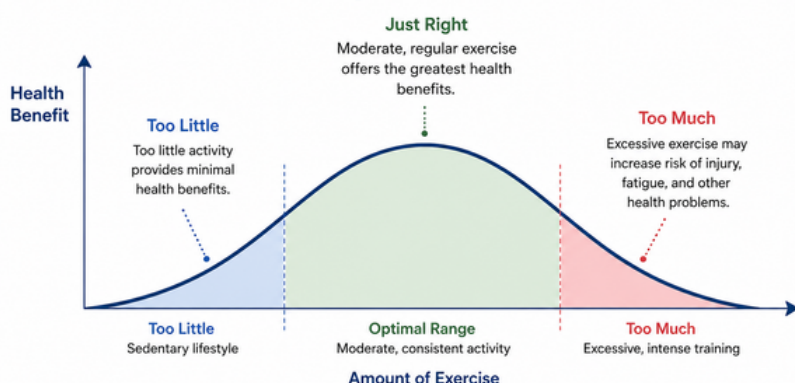
Why Moderate Exercise Works So Well

One of the most reassuring findings in preventive cardiology is this: You do not need to train like an athlete to meaningfully reduce cardiovascular risk.

For most adults, regular moderate-intensity activity is enough to improve:

- ✓ Blood pressure
 - ✓ Insulin sensitivity
 - ✓ Triglycerides and metabolic health
 - ✓ Vascular function
 - ✓ Overall cardiovascular fitness
- Moderate exercise simply means activity that raises you

The Bell-Shaped Curve of Exercise



The goal is **balance**. Aim for regular, moderate exercise you can sustain for long-term heart and overall health.

Exercise: Finding the Right Dose

breathing and heart rate — while still allowing you to speak comfortably in full sentences. This often includes:

- Brisk walking
- Comfortable cycling
- Swimming
- Light jogging
- Recreational sports

In fact, major guidelines recommend about 150 minutes per week of moderate activity — roughly 25–30 minutes on most days. And importantly, many of the benefits plateau well before extreme exercise levels are reached. The body responds remarkably well to regularity. Not occasional exhaustion.



Rethinking the Goal of Exercise

Many people exercise primarily to “burn calories.” But cardiovascular exercise does far more than that. It improves blood vessel function, metabolic flexibility, heart rate regulation, stress resilience and sleep quality. Exercise is not merely a calorie-burning activity. It is a signal to the body that the system must remain adaptable, efficient, and resilient. And often, the most powerful signals come from modest but repeated effort.

The Real Takeaway

For most people, the goal is not peak performance. It is long-term cardiovascular protection. That usually requires:

- Moderate intensity
- Regular frequency
- Adequate recovery
- Sustainability over years

Not perfection. Not punishment. Not exhaustion. Just movement that becomes part of life.

The Problem with the “Weekend Warrior” Mindset



This is especially relevant in people who:



Have underlying heart disease



Have multiple risk factors



Have been sedentary for years before suddenly starting intense training



The safest exercise plan is usually not the most aggressive one.

It is the one that progresses gradually and can be sustained consistently.



Q Doctor, is walking enough for heart health, or do I also need strength training or gym workouts?

A Walking is one of the best and most accessible forms of exercise for the heart. A regular brisk walk improves blood pressure, blood sugar control, circulation, and overall cardiovascular fitness. For many people, simply becoming consistent with walking can significantly reduce long-term risk.

But heart health is not only about the heart muscle. As we age, maintaining muscle strength also becomes important for metabolism, balance, insulin sensitivity, bone health, and healthy aging overall.

That is where some form of resistance or strength training helps. Importantly, strength training does not necessarily mean heavy gym workouts or bodybuilding. It can be:

- Body-weight exercises
- Resistance bands
- Light weights
- Functional movements done safely and consistently

For most adults, the ideal combination is:

- ✓ Regular walking or aerobic activity PLUS
- ✓ Strength training 2–3 times per week

The goal is not extreme fitness. It is building a body that remains metabolically healthy, physically capable, and sustainable over time.



Dr. Ameya Amonkar
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Consultant Cardiologist



The Minimum Effective Dose of Exercise

1 If you're starting from zero:



→ Begin with 15–20 minutes of walking daily



Every minute counts. Start small, build the habit.

2 If you're moderately active:



→ Aim for 150 minutes per week



That's about 25–30 minutes on most days.

3 If you're highly active:



→ Focus on balance and recovery



Progress is important. So is rest, sleep and recovery.

Exercise Risk Spotlight

When Should You Be Careful?

Exercise is beneficial — but not risk-free in all situations. Be cautious if you have:

- ✓ Known heart disease
- ✓ Unexplained chest discomfort
- ✓ Breathlessness with mild activity
- ✓ Family history of sudden cardiac death
- ✓ Long sedentary period before starting intense exercise

In these situations, medical evaluation is advisable before starting vigorous exercise.

RELATED VIDEO

“Best Exercises to Lower BP Naturally”

▶ Watch on YouTube (HG Cardiowise)



DOCTOR'S PICK



Exercise Tracking Apps: Useful Tool or Just More Numbers?

Popular apps and wearables such as Apple Health, Samsung Health, Garmin Connect, Fitbit, Strava, and Google Fit can be useful tools for improving exercise consistency. The goal is not to create obsession. The goal is to create awareness.

What These Apps Actually Measure

Most apps estimate:

- ✓ Steps
- ✓ Distance
- ✓ Heart rate (if device supported)
- ✓ Active minutes
- ✓ Calories burned

Important Insight

Calorie counts are estimates—not exact values.

They are calculated using:

- Body weight • Age and sex
 - Movement pattern • Heart rate (if available)
- Use calorie numbers to identify trends rather than to "earn" extra food.

Instead of obsessing over calories, focus on these four metrics:

1 Weekly Active Minutes  TARGET 150+ min/week WHY IT MATTERS This is the metric most closely aligned with current exercise guidelines.	2 Exercise Frequency  ASK "How many days did I move this week?" GOAL Spread activity across the week for better heart protection.	3 Resting Heart Rate  WATCH THE TREND Stable or gradually lower may reflect improving fitness. REMEMBER Trend matters more than any single number.	4 Step Count  THERE IS NO MAGIC NUMBER Aim for more movement than yesterday. MANY ADULTS BENEFIT FROM 6,000–8,000+ steps/day
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How I Tell Patients to Use These Apps

Use the app once a week—not every hour. Look for:

- ✓ Consistency
- ✓ Weekly activity minutes
- ✓ Exercise frequency
- ✓ Long-term trends

Don't worry about whether today's walk burned 212 or 238 calories. That difference is far less important than whether you walked at all.

“The most useful exercise metric isn't calories burned. It's whether you are moving consistently enough to protect your future heart.”

FREE QUICK GUIDE

Weekly Exercise Planner

- ✓ Simple weekly schedule
- ✓ Zone guidance
- ✓ Beginner to intermediate levels

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