

How Hard Should I Exercise?

Increasing physical activity improves health and fitness. It is also a key to successfully managing your weight. What is easy for one person may be hard for another. Listen to your body. You are the best judge of how hard you should exercise. Start slowly and build on your physical activity program. Here are some terms you are likely to hear:

“Moderate-Intensity Physical Activity”

- This is how hard you need to exercise for health benefits.
- These physical activities make you breathe a little harder and sweat lightly.
- There are activities you feel you could do for up to 45 minutes. This does not mean that you have to do the activity for this long—just that you feel you could.
- Examples include brisk walking, bicycling on flat ground, dancing, and carrying or stacking wood.



“Vigorous-Intensity Physical Activity”

- These physical activities make you breathe hard, make your heart beat fast, and make you sweat.
- Examples include running, aerobics classes, swimming laps, racquet sports, and shoveling.



Use the following to help you decide if you are exercising at the right intensity:

Talk Test: During moderate-intensity exercise, you should be able to talk with a friend. If you cannot talk comfortably, you are exercising at a vigorous level. If you are just starting to exercise, begin with light- or moderate-intensity activities and build up.



Borg Scale: Use this scale to rate how hard you are exercising. Aerobic activities should be done at level 13, or somewhat hard. Strength activities should be done at levels 15–17, or hard to very hard. You can gradually make activities harder as you become more fit. Activities that used to be hard will become easier over time. For example, slow walking on level ground may be a level 13 effort for you in the beginning. As you become more fit, it may take brisk walking up a slight hill to get to that same level 13 effort.

THE BORG CATEGORY RATING SCALE

Least Effort

- 6
- 7 very, very light
- 8
- 9 very light
- 10
- 11 fairly light
- 12
- 13 somewhat hard
- 14
- 15 hard
- 16
- 17 very hard
- 18
- 19 very, very hard
- 20

Aerobic Training Zone

Strength Training Zone

Maximum Effort