



How exercise benefits your heart

Improved health is a primary motivator among people who routinely exercise. Exercise can help people feel better about themselves and their appearance,

and it has considerable effects on various parts of the body, including the heart. Exercise can help the heart become

Cardiovascular disease is the leading killer of both men and women in the United States. Exercise can be one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk for cardiovascular issues like heart attack, high cholesterol and more. In fact, cardiologists at the New England Baptist Hospital say exercise is not only a risk preventative, but also a healing balm of sorts for heart health.

more efficient and more capable of pumping blood throughout the body, says the health experts behind Kaiser Permanente health plans. Even light to moderate exercise can be highly effective at improving heart health. Harvard Medical School says exercise also promotes positive physiological changes, such as encouraging the heart's arteries to dilate more readily. Exercise also can help with the body's sympathetic nervous system (which controls heart rate and blood pressure) to be less reactive. Ischemic preconditioning is another way that exercise can potentially benefit the heart. According to a 2017 article in *JAMA Cardiology*, heart disease patients who exercised found that exercise could trigger

short periods of ischemia, or reduced blood flow to the heart. After resting for a few minutes, these people saw improved performance when they renewed exercise and got their heart rates up. It is believed that small doses of IPC can help the heart adapt more readily with ischemia and avoid a major response issue down the road. Those at the Cardiovascular Performance Program at Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts General Hospital found that IPC could reduce damage from heart attack by as much as 50 percent. Physical activity also allows better blood flow in the small blood vessels around the heart, potentially preventing clogs that can lead to heart attacks. Furthermore, there is some evidence that exercise can help the body grow more blood vessel branches so there are additional routes blood can take if a usual path is blocked by fatty deposits or narrow arteries. Johns Hopkins Medical Center says exercise also works like a beta-blocker medication that can slow the heart rate naturally to alleviate hypertension. It also can raise levels of HDL, the good cholesterol in the body, helping to improve overall cholesterol levels. There are several reasons why exercise is important to heart health. It's never too late to get with a fitness regimen to prevent or reverse cardiac episodes.

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