

Exercise classes

*A guide for people
with heart conditions*



ACPICR

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists
In Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

Class exercise is group exercise led by an instructor.

The advice in this leaflet refers to aerobic exercise and may seem general because it covers a wide range of activities such as Zumba, Aerobics, Step Classes, Circuits to name but a few.

For water-based activities see separate ACPICR leaflet.

For classes such as Yoga, Pilates and Tai Chi see separate ACPICR leaflet

What are the specific benefits?

- Sociable and fun
- Improves your confidence and well-being
- Motivates you to exercise regularly
- Offers variety
- Class timetables make it easier to commit to regular exercise
- Can focus on increasing or maintaining aerobic fitness and/or strength.
- Supervision and encouragement from class Instructor

When could I start?

It is very important to attend a cardiac rehabilitation programme and tell the team of your wish to return to or start a particular class as they may be able to tailor your cardiac rehab exercise to give you the appropriate skills and knowledge.

When you start depends upon which class you attend, your current level of physical fitness as well as your general health. Your cardiac exercise professional will advise you when they think you are ready.

How can I get started?

It is also very important that you are aware of what is a safe intensity level for you to reach during your exercise.

As with any activity, start low and go slow, build up gradually and pace yourself. There are usually different levels within classes, so it may be best to start at the lowest.

What about warm up and cool down?

The exercises in the first 5 - 15 minutes and last 5 - 10 minutes of the class should be performed at a lower intensity and pace. The length of the warm up and cool down will be dependent on the length of the class as well as the overall intensity.

If the class warm up and cool down feels insufficient consider walking to or from the class or park further away.



Stop exercising if you experience any chest pain, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/or GTN spray/tablets seek medical advice as soon as possible.

How should I feel?

Listen to your body and think about how it compares with how you feel in the cardiac rehabilitation programme.

When you are doing exercise it is normal to feel:

- Slightly sweaty
- Warm or slightly flushed
- Your breathing is deeper and faster, but you can still talk
- Your heart beating faster

It is fine to feel that you are exerting yourself so long as you are not struggling.

In a group class setting it can be easy to try and keep up with those around you; try to go at a pace that feels right for you.

If the class is feeling too difficult then make your movements smaller and/or don't use your arms. This will help reduce the intensity.

If you need to take a break try and keep your feet moving by walking on the spot. Working hard then suddenly stopping may cause dizziness.

If you feel extremely tired following exercise you may have worked too hard, for too long or the class may have been too demanding for you. Inform your Instructor of this, think about reducing the pace at which you are working or change to an easier class.



Other things to consider

- Watch the class before you join to check it's right for you.
- Speak to the instructor before the class if you have any concerns.
- Work at your own pace. Try not to be influenced by the beat of any music.
- Exercise only when feeling well
- Dress appropriately
 - Don't exercise straight after eating a large meal
- If your class involves moving quickly between standing and lying exercises, discuss this with your cardiac exercise professional to ensure this is safe for you
- Remember to take a bottle of water along with you
- Ensure you have taken your medications as prescribed.



Stop exercising if you experience any chest discomfort, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/ or your GTN spray/tablets, seek medical advice as soon as possible.

This guidance is based on available evidence and expert opinion.

Produced by the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

This leaflet is not intended to replace the advice that your doctor or cardiovascular rehabilitation team give you based on their expert knowledge of your condition.

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