

Summertime's a Great Time to Exercise!

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With warmer temperatures, summertime is a great time to get outside, enjoy the outdoors and exercise. Regular exercise has a number of benefits for your cardiovascular health. Exercise intolerance (fatigue/shortness of breath) is a common symptom of congestive heart failure, but regular exercise can actually help improve heart muscle function and reduce symptoms of fatigue and shortness of breath. Regular exercise also helps control your weight, improve your cholesterol profile, sharpen your mental health and keep you active and independent longer as you age.

While exercise has been shown to be safe even for patients with known cardiovascular problems, here are some tips to consider when thinking about an exercise program:

- If you haven't been exercising, check with your physician for an evaluation before beginning an exercise program.
- Choose activities/exercise you will enjoy; walking, biking, swimming or a combination of things. The important thing is to get moving!
- Make it a part of your daily routine.
- Exercise with others.
- Consider a formal exercise program specially designed for patients with congestive heart failure, such as the exercise/conditioning classes offered through Heart Center of the Rockies.
- Walk/exercise outside during the morning or evening hours when temperatures are cooler. If it's too hot, exercise indoors; walk at the mall or join a gym.
- During warmer weather, drink a little bit of extra fluids to make up for fluids you will lose with perspiration.
- Don't overdo it. Increase your exercise over time if you are able, but don't try to do too much, too fast. (A supervised exercise program can help provide some guidance if you are new to exercise.)
- Set a goal of at least 20-30 minutes of exercise per day (or most days of the week).

How much water do I need to drink in a day?

Unfortunately there's not a "one size fits all" answer to this common question. In general, most people self-regulate their fluid intake and get adequate water without much thought or attention. The rule of thumb for most people is to drink 8 glasses of water or fluids a day. There is no proven benefit to drinking more than that unless you are exercising and need extra fluids to replace water lost due to perspiration.

Patients with CHF certainly shouldn't force themselves to drink extra fluids (unless you have been exercising and fluid retention/edema isn't a problem for you). Generally, patients with CHF take diuretics to promote fluid loss. Drinking extra fluids counteracts the diuretics and simply keeps you running to the bathroom. Your doctor will let you know if you need to strictly limit fluid intake, which is necessary sometimes.