

Health

Help your heart with physical activity

According to the Heart Foundation, just 30 minutes of physical activity a day can reduce the risk of heart disease by 35 per cent. It can also reduce the risk of type two diabetes, falls and dementia later in life and has been shown to help in the management of depression and anxiety.

If you've experienced a cardiac event, physical activity is just as important. Being active will help with your recovery and lower your risk of more problems.

Cardiac rehabilitation physiotherapist at Castlemaine Health, Melissa Wade, says that while in years gone by patients would have been advised to rest after a cardiac event, current research shows clear, long-term benefits to getting up and active as soon as possible.

"Gently getting moving again in those first six to eight weeks after an incident has an enormous impact on how a person will progress and their life duration," says Melissa. The cardiac rehabilitation program at Castlemaine Health runs for eight weeks and includes a weekly session of supervised exercise followed by an information session.

"We cater to people of any age and the program is really broad and user friendly," says Melissa.

"Some people have just left hospital after heart surgery or a heart event, others may have had a problem a few years ago but want to freshen up their knowledge.

"We can work with everyone."

Melissa develops an exercise program to suit each participant, building the level and intensity gradually, and all sessions are supervised.

Information sessions cover everything from the basics of how the heart works to understanding and managing risk factors like smoking, high fat diets, sedentary lifestyles and stress.

A pharmacist comes in and talks about cardiac medications, occupational therapists run a session about getting back on track and dieticians help make sense of the dietary information people are given.

Managing mental health and stress is an important focus.

"If you're depressed, stressed or anxious, you can actually increase your risk of a cardiac event," says cardiac rehabilitation coordinator, Antoinette O'Shaughnessy.

"People who are depressed are more likely to withdraw socially, smoke, drink and eat the wrong foods.

"The hormones released when you're stressed or anxious put your heart rate and blood pressure up and increase your rate of clotting. They also push up your risk of obesity and diabetes."

"We can connect our participants with psychologists and we engage them in one of the best mental health treat-

ments around, physical activity. We also work on managing their response to stress with mindfulness meditation."

Castlemaine Health offers two cardiac rehabilitation programs. One for people who have experienced a heart attack or had heart surgery and one for people who have been diagnosed with heart failure, a different diagnosis where the heart muscle is damaged and doesn't pump properly. Both sessions follow a similar format.

If you think you or someone you know could benefit from attending either of these programs speak to your GP about a referral.

For information and referrals contact:

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Q&A

Q: What type of exercise should I be doing for heart health?

A: For general heart health, anything aerobic for 30 minutes most days of the week is ideal. Walking, swimming, cycling and dancing are all great. You want your breathing rate to be up. Choose something you like, that you can stick with but remember; you don't have to love it. Exercise is a bit like eating, drinking and sleeping, you've got to do it, especially if you've had a cardiac event, but build your activity up gradually and work with your GP or health professional.

Q: Do I have to do the whole 30 minutes at once?

A: Committing to 30 minutes every day can be overwhelming. If it is, break it up. Three 10-minute blocks can feel a lot more achievable. Swap your drive to the shops for the morning paper with a walk, suggest a walking meeting instead of sitting at your desk during the day and take the dog around the block before dinner and you're done.

Q: I exercise but my job involves a lot of sitting is this a problem?

A: According to the Heart Foundation sitting time is a health risk for children and adults. There's evidence that shows adults who sit less throughout the day have a lower risk of early death, particularly from heart disease, and that even if you meet guidelines for physical activity this may not help reduce the risks of sitting too much. Maybe try walking to and from work. During the day take regular breaks where you step away from your desk and see if you can do some of your tasks standing up.

Diabetes and your heart

Unfortunately, if you have diabetes you have a significantly higher risk of a cardiac event. That's because diabetes can increase the sugary fats in the blood causing blood vessels to narrow or clog up. One of the most significant things you can do to reduce the risk is to meet with your GP and/or diabetes educator.

You can also reduce the risk by:

- Being physically active
- Losing weight if you are overweight
- Not smoking
- Managing blood fats
- Managing high blood pressure
- Taking medication as prescribed



**Castlemaine Health cardiac rehabilitation physiotherapist
Melissa Wade and cardiac rehabilitation coordinator,
Antoinette O'Shaughnessy**

Send us your questions or tips about health and wellbeing

Write to us to have your question or tip featured here.

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