



Ask The Trainer | Question # 1

How Much Exercise Should You Aim For Per Week?

With so much information out there, it can be difficult to determine how much exercise we really need to live a healthier life, to increase our fitness and/or to see changes in body composition.

So how much exercise do we really need per week? **The [Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines](#) suggest that adults aim for 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous cardiovascular activity per week, in addition to at least 2 strength training workouts involving major muscle groups.**

These physical activity guidelines were set because research has shown that this is the minimum amount of exercise that we need to reduce our risk of disease and maintain our health.

In this article, I'll define which activities are categorized as cardiovascular exercise and how to determine what intensity we are working at, as well as ways that we can incorporate strength training into our routines.

Cardiovascular Exercise

What is cardiovascular exercise?

Cardiovascular exercise is exercise that trains your aerobic system by increasing your heart rate and respiration which increases oxygen and blood flow throughout the body while using large muscle groups of the body repetitively. Cardiovascular activity works to increase heart health but does not train the muscles to be stronger.

What types of exercise are cardiovascular?

Examples of cardiovascular exercise include:

- Walking
- Jogging/running
- Biking
- Swimming
- Sports (basketball, soccer, hockey, badminton, squash, volleyball, etc..)
- Fitness Classes (unless we're using heavier weights and taking longer rest periods)

The best types of cardiovascular exercise are the ones that we enjoy and that we can engage in regularly.

What is a moderate-to-vigorous intensity?

The guidelines suggest that our cardiovascular activity should be at a moderate-to-vigorous level of intensity, this means that we should be working hard enough that the exercise feels at least moderately challenging.

If an exercise is at a moderate intensity, we may notice:

- Our breathing rate increases, but we are not out of breath
- We can carry a conversation, but we can't sing
- Our heart rate increases to 50-70% of our heart rate max

If an exercise is at a vigorous intensity, we may notice:

- Our breathing is more rapid
- We can't carry a fluent conversation
- We start sweating more easily
- Our heart rate increases to 70-85% of our heart rate max

Cardiovascular training can be done for shorter and longer time periods but usually depends on what intensity we are working at. Low-to-moderate intensity exercises typically last 45-60 minutes and higher intensity exercises are typically 45 minutes or less.

Strength Training Exercise

What is strength training?

Strength training is a form of exercise that challenges our muscles to grow stronger and more resistant to injury by presenting a load (our own bodyweight or an additional weight) that the muscles must overcome.

What types of exercise are strength exercises?

Examples of strength training are:

- Bodyweight Exercises (squats, push ups, pull ups and lunges)
- Lifting Weights (overhead presses, bench press, deadlifts, bicep/tricep exercises)
- Cable/Band Exercises
- Climbing Stairs (only if this is challenging for you)

What should a strength training workout look like?

If we are only incorporating 2 days per week of strength training, then I suggest both workouts be full body workouts. This means that we are incorporating exercise for the whole body rather than just the legs, or just the arms.

I suggest you pick one exercise for each part of the body and complete 3 sets (rounds) of 8-10 repetitions of the exercise to start with. The weight you choose for the exercise should be whatever weight you are able to complete between 8-10 reps with.

If the weight is too light, then the 8-10 reps will feel easy, in which case we should increase the weight we are using; otherwise, we won't be challenging our muscles enough to get any stronger.

If the weight is too heavy, then we will not be able to get 8-10 reps with good technique, in which case we should lower the weight.

An example full body workout could be (*click on the links below for video of each exercise*):

- [Squats](#): 3 sets of 10
- [Push Ups](#): 3 sets of 10
- [Cable or Banded Row](#): 3 sets of 10
- [Lunges](#): 3 sets of 5/side
- [Shoulder Press](#): 3 sets of 8
- [Plank](#): 3 sets of 20-30 second holds

What if I don't get this much exercise?

If we're not reaching the suggested amounts of exercise, then we may not be getting the full benefits of exercise in prevention of muscle breakdown (especially as we age) and the cardiovascular benefits that help to prevent sickness and disease.

If we find it challenging to reach these guidelines initially, I suggest we do as much as we currently can to build up our levels of fitness.

Doing something is always better than doing nothing! So, if we are not able to meet these guidelines at this time, do not be discouraged – progress will come if we put in the effort.

Can I do more exercise than this?

We can absolutely engage in more exercise than recommended if we have the time and we enjoy it! The more exercise we engage in the more benefits we can achieve, as long as we are recovering between exercise bouts.

It is common for individuals to be getting more than 150 minutes of cardiovascular activity if they are active, but strength training is often neglected. The benefits of strength training for increasing quality of life, and improving composition is unmatched!

If we're looking to incorporate more exercise into our routine and are already meeting the guidelines, I suggest we focus on incorporating more strength training sessions throughout the week!

Final Thoughts

At the end of the day, the goal should be to at least meet the physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity and 2 strength training sessions per week. If this is not currently attainable, then we should aim to move as much as we can.

■ By Amanda Parker, CGC Exercise Specialist



Self-described fitness superpower: Super strength, because lifting heavy things is pretty neat!