



Active Living Tips for Older Adults

Practical, leading edge research results applied to physical activity for older adults, in plain language for health practitioners and leaders.
 Sponsored by the Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA).

Exercise For Your Heart's Sake: It's Never Too Late

By M.T. Sharratt, Ph.D., Professor and Dean, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences,
 University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.

Active Living Coalition for Older Adults

33 Laird Dr., Toronto
 ON, M4G 3S9

Toll-free: 800 549-9799

Tel.: 416-423-2163

Fax: 416 423-2112

E-mail: alcoa@ca.inter.net
www.alcoa.ca

*Additional copies of
 ALCOA Research
 Update issues and
 research references
 for this article are
 available in print and
 electronic formats
 from the ALCOA
 office, or can be
 downloaded from
www.ALCOA.ca*

*The financial support
 of Health Canada
 is gratefully
 acknowledged.*

Ce document est
 aussi disponible
 en français.

© ALCOA 2001

Hearth disease is the number one killer of older men and women. This statistic is unlikely to change in the near future because the population of older people is growing faster than any other age group. Also, heart disease is more common than any other disability except arthritis.

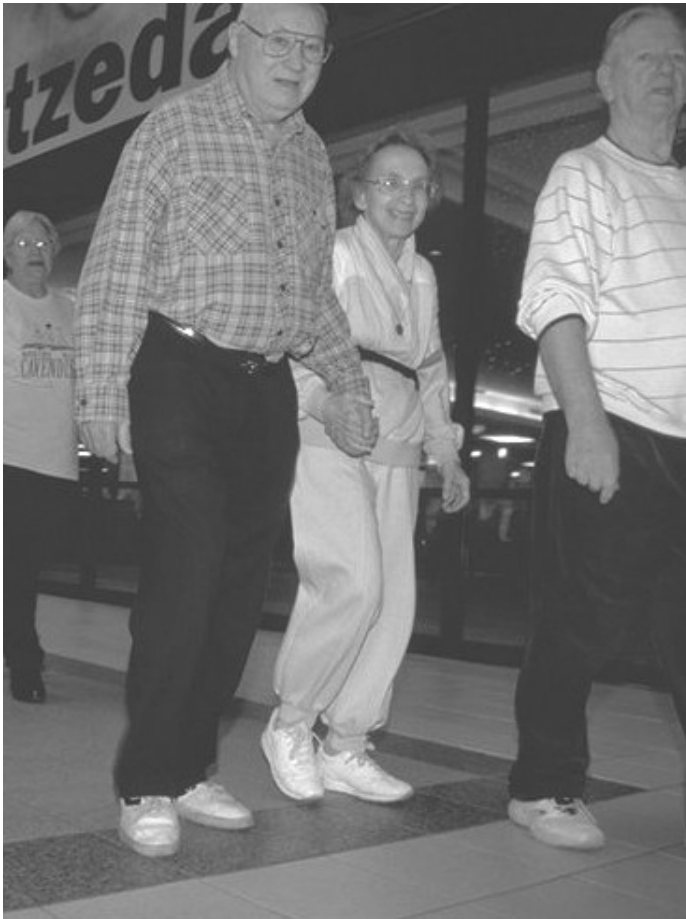
People used to think that only men got coronary heart disease, but in fact, cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death among older women. The only difference is that women develop the disease about ten years later than men do. Doctors think that estrogen protects women from heart disease.

The question is whether you can reduce the risk of heart disease as you get older. The answer is yes! You can do many things right now and every day to avoid heart disease. Heart disease is a "lifestyle disease" because how we choose to live affects our heart health. If you choose to eat mostly junk food, smoke cigarettes and spend the day sitting, your heart will inevitably have to work overtime. Eventually, this unhealthy behaviour will cause some part of your heart to break down.

Daily activity over many years can help protect against heart disease. Researchers have found that being active can lower your resting heart rate, lower your blood pressure and improve your fitness. Studies show that older men and women who exercise live longer and do not develop heart disease as often as people who do not exercise. Studies also show that active men are less likely to have a stroke.

In most of these studies, people walked at least 30 minutes five times a week. Thirty minutes a day of moderate exercise is very manageable, even for people who have not been active. It does not matter what kind of exercise or activity you choose. You can swim, ride a bike, walk your dog, or garden. The only rule is that it must make your heart beat a little faster and make you breathe a little harder.





As the title of this article says, it's never too late. The British Regional Heart Study found that older men who started a program of exercise were less likely to die prematurely than men who stayed inactive. The most important thing to remember is that you must exercise today and regularly to protect yourself from heart disease.

If you are older and haven't been exercising regularly, talk to your doctor before you start working toward 30 minutes of exercise every day. It's especially important to talk to your doctor if you are already living with coronary heart disease.

If you want to get more active, a good place to start is by reading Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living for Older Adults. You can get a free copy online at www.paguide.com, or by calling 1-888-334-9769.

Walking more quickly than normal is a good idea of how hard you need to work. Imagine walking quickly (not running) to reach the bus stop or an appointment on time.

You don't even have to exercise for 30 minutes without stopping. You could go for a 10 minute walk 3 times a day. Whatever activity you choose, make sure you choose one that you enjoy. If you like doing it, you are more likely to do it every day.

Resistance exercise means you give your muscles a workout. Climbing stairs, shoveling in the garden and carrying grocery bags are all resistance exercises. At least one major study found that people who worked at getting stronger were also less likely to develop heart disease.



*Health practitioners, leaders and others please post, copy and distribute this article to older adults.
The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Health Canada or ALCOA.*