

Examples of exercise and intensities

The guide below will depend as to how vigorous you are with your activities, and how much effort you put into them.

Low intensity:

- Bowling
- Cricket
- Snooker
- Golf

Low—moderate intensity:

- Table tennis
- Volleyball

Low—high intensity:

- Badminton
- Running (long distance)
- Soccer
- Tennis
- Race walking
- Hockey

Moderate:

- Horse-riding
- Skating
- Rugby
- Sprint running (short distance)
- Surfing
- Basketball
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Netball

High:

- Martial arts
- Windsurfing
- Sailing
- Climbing
- Skateboarding
- Snowboarding
- Skiing
- Boxing
- Rowing
- Triathlon
- Cycling

Scuba diving

If you would like to scuba dive, your ability to do so will depend on your underlying condition and what operations you have had in the past. Always speak to your ACHD team before you do this to find out if you are safe to.

Fair ground and theme park rides

Intense excitement / anxiety increase heart rate and blood pressure. When added with the acceleration and rapid changes in direction of rides, this may place a strain on the heart and blood vessels.

Some rides also have powerful electro-magnets. These can interfere with the functioning of pacemakers and implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (ICD) and should be avoided.

If you are unsure always seek advice first.

Useful links

The Somerville Foundation

www.thesf.org.uk

Little Heart Matters

www.lhm.org.uk

British Heart Foundation

www.bhf.org.uk

Cardiology (ACHD Nursing Team)
Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham
Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston
Birmingham, B15 2GW

Telephone: 07768 801095
Email: achdnurses@uhb.nhs.uk



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Physical activity for patients with Congenital Heart Disease (CHD)

Many people born with CHD can take part in some form of physical exercise. Always check with your Cardiologist or Specialist Nurse if unsure.

Benefits of physical activity:

- Strengthens bones and joints
- Improves muscle strength and flexibility
- Improves cardiovascular health
- Improves psychological health
- Strengthens immune system
- Improves concentration and memory
- Develops co-ordination
- Helps maintain healthy body weight

Key points to remember:

- It is important to start slowly and gradually increase the duration and intensity of exercise
- You need to be aware which intensity of exercise is suitable for you: low, moderate or high
- Make sure you warm up and cool down properly so that your heart rate and breathing rate increase and decrease gradually and the muscles gently begin to work
- It will take a few weeks of steadily increasing the amount of exercise you do before you notice your fitness improving

The talking test:

If you cannot carry on a conversation easily because you are out of breath then you are doing vigorous (high) intensity exercise. This may be too much for some CHD patients.

It is important to stop if:

- You feel unwell
- You are struggling to get your breath
- You feel dizzy / faint
- You become pale & clammy (sweaty)
- Your heart beat feels strange or very fast

Remember to drink plenty of water whilst exercising to keep hydrated, especially in warm and humid conditions. When you sweat you can quickly become dehydrated and your heart has to work harder.

Sports that should be avoided for some patients:

- Contact sports e.g. rugby, boxing or judo. This is due to risk of direct trauma to chest
- Endurance sports e.g. marathon running, cross country and triathlon
- Heavy weights due to big changes in blood pressure which can cause blood vessels to tear

Weights are not recommended in patients with conditions affecting their aorta including Marfans syndrome, Loeys Dietz syndrome, previous aortic dissection or aortic root dilatation.

Resistance (strength) training can be safe if weights are kept low. If you are unable to do 10-15 repetitions comfortably, you need to reduce the weight.

Levels of intensity

Low intensity:

- No noticeable effect on breathing or heart rate
- Easy to have a conversation or sing without pausing for breath
- Feels very easy and you could carry on with the activity

Moderate intensity:

- Breathing and heart rate faster
- Feeling a little warmer
- Can carry on a conversation easily but cannot speak in full sentences or sing without pausing for breath
- Feels comfortable and you can keep going for a long time

High intensity:

- Breathing much harder and faster, and your heart rate is faster
- Feeling warm and sweating
- You cannot talk easily as you are too out of breath
- Feels harder and you cannot keep going for a long time

Please speak to your doctor or nurse if you are unsure what activity is safe for you to do.