Living with HIV

HIV and Exercise

For HIV-positive and HIV-negative people alike, exercise is one of the keys to good health. A growing body of research shows that physical activity not only helps maintain a healthy weight and reduces cardiovascular disease risk, but it also reduces inflammation and can help prevent cancer, diabetes, dementia, fatty liver disease (which can lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer) and other chronic health conditions. This is especially important for people aging with HIV, as they are more prone to these conditions than their HIV-negative peers.

What are the benefits of exercise?
Beyond disease prevention, exercise can improve overall quality of life, offering benefits including:

- Increased bone strength and muscle mass
- Higher energy level
- Increased endurance
- Better control of blood sugar and blood fat levels
- Better cognitive function
- Improved mood and mental health
- Better sleep
- Improved sexual desire and function.

How often should I exercise?

Experts recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week as well as strength training activities at least two days per week. Making time to get some exercise most days is an important part of a healthy lifestyle.

The overall goal, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is to move more and sit less throughout the day. People who do any amount of moderate to vigorous activity gain health benefits. If exercising is difficult due to physical limitations, even a small amount of activity is better than none.

What kind of exercise is best?

Generally speaking, there are two types of exercise:

- Aerobic exercise gets your heart pumping and your breathing rate up, burning fat and improving cardiovascular function. Examples include walking, hiking (especially with hills), running, bicycling, swimming, skating and dancing.
- Strength training exercise tones and strengthens muscles. Examples include weight lifting, using resistance bands and exercises such as push-ups, pull-ups, crunches and leg squats.

You don't need to go to a gym or buy special clothes or fancy equipment to exercise. Pick a type of exercise you enjoy. The goal is to find activities that fit into your daily life so you're motivated to do them regularly. Some people prefer to start their day with exercise in the morning, while others prefer to wind down with exercise in the evening. Vary your activities to prevent boredom, taking advantage of the weather and seasons. Many people enjoy participating in team sports, while others prefer solo activities. Yoga, Pilates, tai chi and qigong—which promote strength, balance and flexibility—can be good options, particularly for people who are older or have physical limitations.

Remember, everyday activities, such as walking the dog and gardening, contribute to your total weekly physical activity. You can add more activity to your day by taking the stairs instead of the elevator or parking farther away from your destination and walking part of the way.

How do I start an exercise program?
Before starting a new exercise regimen, check in with your health care provider, especially if you are older or have underlying health conditions. Almost everyone can find a level and type of activity that's safe and beneficial for them.

Joining a gym or taking a class offer access to equipment you don't have at home and can motivate you to exercise regularly. Community gyms, such as the YMCA, may offer free or low-cost memberships. Many classes are available online. A personal trainer or fitness coach can help design an exercise program that's right for you.

If you're just starting out, build up slowly—for example, by bicycling several more minutes each day or lifting a bit more weight each time you work out. Be sure to stretch and warm up at the beginning of each exercise session to reduce the risk of injury. You may find it useful to keep a written log of your exercise routine so you can track your progress over time.

While exercise is generally safe, it's important to know your limits. Overtraining can lead to muscle soreness and fatigue, and pushing yourself too hard—for example, lifting too much weight or not paying attention to your form and posture—can increase the risk of injury. If you're not feeling well, skip a day or more.

Don't forget to get enough sleep, eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of water before, during and

after exercising. Listen to your body: It will tell you when you can step up the pace or need to slow down or take a break.

Last Reviewed: July 7, 2025

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/basics/hiv-basics/hiv-exercise