

Are You Exercising Hard Enough?

You don't have to sprint like a racer in order to reap a lifetime of health benefits from aerobic exercise. Even a leisurely walk is better than sitting on the couch watching TV. However, you will gain more significant health benefits if you pick up the pace to at least a moderate intensity.

The health benefits of sticking to a moderate pace include:

- **Reduced risk for heart disease**
- **Lower blood pressure levels**
- **Healthier cholesterol levels**
- **Weight control**

WHAT COUNTS AS MODERATE INTENSITY?

A moderately intense activity raises your heart rate and makes you break a sweat. When you're doing vigorous-intensity activity, you should be breathing hard and fast, and your heart rate should go up significantly. A brisk walk turns intense if you break into a jog.

By boosting your activity level from moderate to vigorous, you will reap the benefits in half the time. Experts recommend getting 25 minutes or more of vigorous exercise at least three times a week. In contrast, moderate exercisers need to work out for at least 30 minutes on five or more days a week.

DOES IT FEEL INTENSE?

Then it probably is. The more vigorously you exercise, the faster you breathe and the more you sweat. You also can use the talk test. If you can talk comfortably, you're working out at a moderate intensity. But when doing vigorous exercise, you're too out of breath to talk.

If you have been inactive or plan to up your activity level, talk with your doctor about the amount and type of exercise that's right for you.

Sources include the American Academy of Family Physicians, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Office of Women's Health, Department of Health and Human Services.

