

## “Pick up the pace!”

by *Haley R. Tucker, 3rd yr Nursing Student*

*This article summarizes research published in Annals of Internal Medicine by Dr. Robert Ross at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Dr. Ross is an exercise physiologist in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies. His research focuses on the effects of exercise on obesity and glucose tolerance.*

**M**any older Canadians have heart disease, or know someone who does. Heart disease, also known as cardiovascular disease, occurs when our heart and blood vessels are no longer able to provide the oxygen and energy we need for everyday activities. It is the number one cause of death worldwide. The World Health Organization predicts that by 2030, more than 23 million people will die from the disease.

What many people don't know is that small changes in your exercise routine can go a long way in preventing heart disease. With a few simple changes, your next walk around the neighbourhood or on the treadmill will gain you more protection from heart disease.

### **How can faster walking prevent heart disease?**

Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that we get at least 150 minutes of physical activity, such as walking, each week. Managing to find the time or opportunity to exercise for 150 minutes can be challenging. So how do you make it worth your while?

Researchers have found that increasing the intensity of your walk or jog by even small amounts can reduce your risk of heart disease. When you choose to exercise at a higher intensity, you reduce your risk of heart disease twice as much compared to exercising at a low intensity.

Older Canadians with diabetes can also benefit from these findings since high-intensity exercise helps to control blood glucose. Researchers found that 200 minutes a week of higher intensity exercise improved the way the body processes sugar. That helps your heart because poor glucose tolerance is a known risk factor for heart disease.



### **How can I increase the intensity of my exercise?**

- When walking on a treadmill, increase your speed.
- When walking outdoors, time yourself and try to beat your best time.
- Challenge yourself by including bursts of jogging in your walk.
- Try walking or hiking on a terrain that has hills or inclines.
- Try a faster-paced physical activity such as zumba, swimming, or cross country skiing.
- Try stair climbing machines at a fitness facility.

Exercise at a pace that works best for you and that fits your schedule. Physical activity can be broken up into 10-minute bouts throughout the week, with the ultimate goal of reaching 150 minutes. Begin at a pace that is comfortable for you, and keep building up the intensity until your heart is beating faster and your breathing picks up.

An excellent starting point is walking, since it is considered a moderate-intensity activity. And it's something we do naturally, without special equipment. No matter what activity you choose, ensure that it is pleasurable and challenging so that you feel motivated to do it regularly.

## **Other ways to get more from your exercise**

If you find it hard to step up the intensity of your workout, there are still ways to protect your heart. You can also reduce your risk of heart disease by simply walking or jogging at a comfortable pace for longer periods of time. Researchers suggest about 300 minutes per week.

Exercising for longer periods of time at a moderate intensity can reduce your waist circumference – the measurement around your waist. By doing this, you help to decrease your risk of developing heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

How to find the extra time? Build it into your day-to-day activities. Do simple things like taking the stairs instead of an elevator, walking instead of driving, and opting for activities that get you up and moving.

Next time you are out and about, challenge yourself by picking up the pace just a little. It really is good for the health of your heart.

*Learn more:*

Ross, R., Hudson, R., Stotz, P., & Lam, M. (2015). *Effects of Exercise Amount and Intensity on Abdominal Obesity and Glucose Tolerance in Obese Adults*. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 325-334.

*Waist size matters*, from the Harvard School of Public Health

*Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Adults 65 years and older*

*Cardiovascular disease and controlling high blood pressure*, from the World Health Organization

*About the Author:*

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