

# Returning to Physical Activity *After* COVID-19

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People who get COVID-19 can have different experiences. Some have no symptoms. Others have severe symptoms leading to hospitalization. Common symptoms may include fever, chills, chest pain, shortness of breath, cough, loss of smell and taste, rash, cold-like symptoms, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, headache and/or muscle aches.

Most people who've had COVID-19 typically feel better within days to weeks. But some people take longer to recover. "Long COVID" is when you have symptoms that last weeks to months after first being infected. This can happen whether you had mild symptoms or were hospitalized for COVID-19. Long COVID symptoms can include fatigue, brain fog, headache, shortness of breath, racing heart rate, dizziness, depression and anxiety. These symptoms can affect your return to physical activity.

## Benefits of Physical Activity

**Moderate-intensity physical activity is associated with better immune function** *when compared to those who are less active.* Regular physical activity can also help **reduce stress** and lower your risk of chronic medical conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes.

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend:

- At least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, divided however it may fit into your daily life (every minute counts!) and
- 2 sessions per week of strength training involving all major muscle groups



Start moving. **Be safe. Think positive.**

Use a gradual approach. Start with light-intensity activity. Returning to physical activity too soon could increase health risks associated with COVID-19, particularly heart problems.

## Return to Physical Activity Gradually

COVID-19 symptoms should be *completely gone for at least 7 days before returning to physical activity.*

- For the young and old, physical activity is important for recovery from COVID-19 and boosting the immune system.
- Those who are recovering from COVID-19 but without any symptoms can do light- to moderate-intensity exercise as tolerated.



Check with your doctor before doing moderate- to high-intensity exercise if you had or continue to have COVID-19 symptoms — especially those involving the heart or lungs (such as chest pain, shortness of breath, lightheadedness or racing heart rate). Anyone with severe symptoms or who was hospitalized for COVID-19 should get their doctor's approval before returning to physical activity at greater than light intensity.

**Your physical activity plan may include aerobic, strength, balance and stretching exercises — as long as you've had no symptoms of COVID-19 for the past 7 days.**



Start low. Go slow. Begin at 25% of your pre-COVID-19 activity level (distance, resistance and speed); or at a light intensity (you can carry on a conversation easily during the activity). Stay at that level for at least 7 days *without symptoms getting worse* before doing more.



**Don't sit all day! For example:** If you're at your computer or watching TV, get up periodically (or during every commercial) and do a lap around your home or an active chore. For example, throw some clothes in the laundry, do the dishes or take out the garbage. Stand up and move!

The next page outlines some strategies for gradually resuming physical activity after recovery from COVID-19...



# Aerobic Activity

## Indoor Activities

- Put some music on and walk around the house or up and down the stairs for 10 to 15 minutes, 2 to 3 times per day.
- Dance to your favorite music.
- Do an exercise video.
- Use water bottles or milk jugs as light weights.

## Outdoor Activities

- Walk or jog around your neighborhood.
- Be active in a local park. Spend time in nature.
- Go for a bicycle ride.
- Do gardening and lawn work.
- Play active games with your family.

## Aerobic activity gradual plan (adapt for walking, biking, swimming, jogging):

- First, make sure that you can walk safely around your home without symptoms getting worse or loss of balance.
- Start at 25% of your distance and speed prior to COVID-19 (or exercise at a light intensity).
- When your distance is back to normal, increase to moderate intensity (you can hold a conversation but could not sing a tune) by increasing your speed, adding hills or increasing the incline on a treadmill.
- Only begin jogging after 7 to 14 days of successfully walking your normal distance at a moderate intensity.
- Progress to walk/jog intervals: 3-minute walk/1 minute jog.
- Gradually lengthen your jogging intervals (or shorten your recovery intervals) until your muscle and energy levels allow for a jogging workout.



# Strength Training

- Download a strength workout app to your smart phone, such as the 7-Minute Workout (no equipment necessary).
- Do a strength training video.
- Perform yoga — deep breathing and mindfulness can also reduce stress.

- Find ways to do simple muscle strengthening exercises around your house such as:
  - Squats or sit-to-stands from a sturdy chair
  - Push-ups against a wall, the kitchen counter or the floor
  - Lunges or single leg step-ups on stairs

## Strength training gradual plan:

- Begin lifting only *after* 7 successful days of walking.
- Start with 1 set of light resistance/weights (1 to 5 lbs. or about 25% of what you were lifting before COVID-19) for each major muscle group (upper arms, legs) at 8 to 10 repetitions.
- Next increase the number of sets back to your normal (or 3 sets of 10 reps).
- Then increase the weight by about 2 to 3 lbs. — or whatever you can handle.

## More Help

Go to [www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro](http://www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro) to find an **ACSM certified exercise professional**.

How will I get started **this week?** \_\_\_\_\_