Exercise can improve the strength and efficiency of your heart. You’ve likely heard it many times before, and it’s true: Exercise is necessary for health and well-being. In Chapter 2, you’ll learn about the importance of exercise and reducing sedentary behavior to help prevent heart disease.

Improving Your Health through Exercise

Exercise has numerous benefits for health. It may reduce the risk of health issues including heart disease, diabetes and cancer, plus help with weight, lower blood pressure, reduce stress and improve your outlook, energy and sleep. The health of your heart is both directly and indirectly influenced by exercise, as many of the risk factors associated with heart disease can also be improved through exercise. Talk to your doctor before starting to exercise.

Benefits for Your Heart

Your heart is a muscle. Similar to the other muscles in your body, exercise may strengthen it. By performing regular exercise, you may increase your body’s ability to utilize oxygen, subsequently improving your circulation and your heart’s ability to pump. As a result, your heart becomes stronger and more efficiently pushes blood throughout your body with the help of your lungs. By pumping more efficiently, your heart rate may lower, resulting in the possibility of lower blood pressure.

Fast Fact: Regular exercise may help reduce your risk of heart disease by half! Those who don’t exercise regularly have double the risk of developing heart disease.²

Reciprocal Benefits

Remember the risk factors within your control discussed in Chapter 1? Well, exercise may influence the majority of these factors to further reduce your risk for heart disease. Exercise helps with high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, weight management, stress and sleep.

• Regular exercise may help keep your arteries clear from the buildup of plaque.
• Exercise increases your body’s production of good HDL cholesterol. This prevents the accumulation of cholesterol, and the HDL can even remove some of the bad LDL cholesterol.
• Less bad cholesterol may also decrease your blood pressure.
• Through exercise, your body begins to burn more calories and develop muscle. This may help you lose weight by increasing your metabolic rate.
• Improved weight management also impacts your blood pressure, cholesterol and risk for diabetes.
• Your risk for diabetes and, subsequently, heart disease is further reduced as your body is able to control glucose levels more effectively.
• Exercising regularly may also help to reduce your stress levels and anxiety through the release of brain-pleasing neurotransmitters.
• Lower stress, improved circulation and weight management may all add up to better sleep. Decreased stress and improved sleep may lower your risk for heart disease.³

Next Steps

1. Read Lesson 2: “Tips for Heart Healthy Exercise”
2. Read Lesson 3: “Reducing Sedentary Behavior”
3. Take the Chapter 2 Quiz

Sources

3. health.harvard.edu. Healthbeat. 2 Ways to Protect Your Heart: Improve Sleep and Manage Stress. 2013