

# Talking to Your Doctor About Exercise

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## Exercise offers multiple benefits, no matter your health condition

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Dr. David Winter is board certified in internal medicine and is the current Chief Clinical Officer and Chairman of the Board of Health Texas Provider Network (HTPN).

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(dailyRx News) You know you need to get off the couch and get moving, but you may not be sure if you should gear up or talk to your doctor first.

"By all means, exercise," said David Winter, MD, chief clinical officer, president and chairman of the board of Baylor Health Care System's HealthTexas Provider Network, in an interview with dailyRx News.

Dr. Winter offered several considerations about implementing a new exercise program.

"First, if you have some medical problems — heart disease, circulation problems — see your doctor first," he said. "If you have diabetes, you probably need an adjustment in your medications."

### Four Kinds of Exercise

According to Dr. Winter, you actually need several types of exercise.

The first type is endurance or aerobic exercise. This means something that gets your heart rate up, such as brisk walking, jogging or swimming. The second type is strengthening exercise. A classic example is lifting weights. The third type is balance exercise. As the name implies, this exercise improves your balance and can be as simple as standing on one foot. The fourth type is flexibility exercise, which stretches your muscles and helps you stay limber.

In some cases, you may get multiple benefits in the same exercise. For instance, playing tennis can improve your endurance and balance and strengthen your legs and arms.

### Plan Ahead

Whether you need to see your doctor before starting an exercise program is dependent on your overall health, according to Dr. Winter. If you are young, don't take any medication and don't have any health problems, you can probably just jump right into an exercise program, as long as you are careful.

However, Dr. Winter cautions that there may be some circumstances in which this isn't the case.

"Say you're healthy but you have some symptoms," Dr. Winter said. "If you have chest pain walking up the stairs, don't start a program without seeing your doctor. If you have extreme fatigue, muscle cramps, exhaustion — see your doctor first."

It's also wise to check with your doctor if you have an old injury like a fracture or a condition that might affect your balance.

To help make this decision, check out a tool developed by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology called the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (Par-Q). Start by making an appointment with your doctor and ask for the Par-Q questionnaire.

### At Your Appointment

When you go to the appointment, make sure to take a list of your current medications and a list of the questions you want to ask.

Some people may feel a little intimidated about talking to a doctor. If the idea makes you anxious, Dr. Winter recommends taking your spouse or a friend who can support you.

### Ask the Right Questions

According to the National Institute on Aging, patients should always ask specific questions at any doctor's appointment. For exercise, two key questions are the following: How does my health affect my ability to exercise, and are there any exercises I should avoid?

For instance, if you have a serious heart condition, you may need to start very slowly under the supervision of a medical professional. Cardiac rehabilitation programs offer electronic heart monitoring and exercise routines that progress

slowly. This may prevent you from doing too much too soon.

If you have arthritis, serious weightlifting might not be a good choice, but swimming could be. Make sure your exercise program meets your individual needs and is within your physical limitations.

### **Take It Slow and Get Expert Advice**

Once you get the green light from your doctor, Dr. Winter cautions that you should still go slowly.

"If you're healthy, start slow ... and if you develop symptoms, get checked," Dr. Winter said. "Don't go into these real active, combat, boot camp, CrossFit exercise routines too fast."

Age also makes a difference, according to Dr. Winter.

"Young folks may be able to exercise every day of the week," Dr. Winter said. "If you're over age 40, probably every other day is good to start out with. If you develop symptoms, see your doctor ... Listen to your body. If you're exercising and it hurts, cut back a little bit."

You may also want to talk to someone who specializes in the field of exercise or sports medicine.

A physiatrist, for instance, is a doctor who specializes in rehabilitation medicine. Physiatrists can tailor an exercise program to meet your specific

needs if you have a serious condition, such as Parkinson's disease, debilitating arthritis or stroke.

Physical therapists and certified personal trainers are also experts in using exercise to maintain mobility, strength and flexibility.