

EXERCISE AND HIV

WHY EXERCISE?

With different health histories and treatment needs, no two HIV-positive people are alike. But there's one factor we all have in common: the need for exercise to stay healthy. Not only is working out good for general health and well-being; it may help prevent or reverse some complications of HIV infection and treatment, including body fat changes (lipodystrophy) and increased weight, as well as higher cholesterol, triglyceride and blood sugar levels. Exercise can also:

- Increase bone strength, muscle mass and endurance.
- Strengthen the immune system, as well as the heart and lungs.
- Improve appetite, sleep, mood, energy level and sex drive.

WHAT KIND OF EXERCISE IS BEST?

Generally speaking, there are two types of exercise:

- **Cardiovascular**, such as running or walking, gets your heart and lungs pumping, helps control body weight and burns body fat.
- **Strength training**, with weights or resistance, tones and strengthens muscles.

Doing both is ideal. But you can't go wrong by doing at least one regularly.

HOW DO I START AN EXERCISE PROGRAM?

Check with your doctor, nurse practitioner or health care provider before beginning an exercise regimen. This is especially true if you have a personal or family history of heart problems, breathing difficulties or light-headedness.

Pick activities you like. Everyone is different. Some like exercising in the morning and others during their lunch hour or at night. Some like sweating alone while others like team sports or gym partners. Be sure to start at a level suited to you. When in doubt, ask your health care provider or an exercise professional (such as a certified trainer at a gym), or visit www.poz.com and search under "fitness."

HOW MUCH SHOULD I WORK OUT?

For cardio, try to get your heart rate up three to five times a week for 20 to 60 minutes. There are lots of ways to do this: walking your dog, jogging, swimming, cycling, hiking, dancing, aerobics classes and so on. If you can't talk while you're doing it, you're working too hard—but if you can sing, you're not working hard enough. As for strength training, fitness clubs and gyms offer a variety of weights and machines. But there are plenty of tools you can use at home, including dumbbells and resistance bands, and you can do calisthenics such as sit ups and squats anywhere.

IS EXERCISE SAFE?

Yes, but it's important that you know your limits. Overtraining can be stressful on the heart, cause you to lose muscle mass, and lead to fatigue. Pushing yourself too hard—lifting too much weight or not paying careful attention to your form and posture—can increase your risk of injury. To decrease the chance of hurting yourself, stretch and warm up before you start, and stretch and cool down afterward. Don't forget to get enough sleep; eat healthfully; drink water before, during and after working out; and listen to your body—it will tell you to slow down, speed up or take a break on days when you're not feeling well.

QUICK TIPS

Fitness is a lifelong commitment. Here's a handful of tips to help you stay motivated.

■ WHAT'S UP, DOC?

Let your doctor or health care provider know about your fitness routine, including what you're doing and how often. Seeing your weight and lab results improve—and your MD smile—makes it all worthwhile.

■ MIX IT UP

Vary your activities to prevent boredom (a definite commitment killer). Take an aerobics class a few nights a week and hit the stationary bike on other nights. Jog in spring and fall, swim in summer and winter.

■ JOIN A GYM

Many enjoy exercising at a fitness club, with access to personal trainers, equipment and group classes. Community gyms like the YMCA may offer free or low-cost memberships if you're on a budget.

■ DEAR DIARY

Keep a written log of your exercise routine. It will help you remember this week's workout agenda and remind you how far you've come from weeks past.

■ THANKS, I'LL WALK

Take the stairs, not the elevator. Get off the train or bus one stop early. When it comes to fitness, those extra steps every day make a big difference.

For more fitness tips,
visit POZ.com