

Why is exercise important?

Physical exercise helps many people with HIV to feel better and can strengthen their immune system. Although physical exercise can neither control nor contend with HIV, it can nonetheless make you feel better and fight many side effects caused by HIV and antiretroviral drugs.

The advantages of exercise

Regular, moderate physical exercise has the same advantages for people with HIV as it does for most other people. Physical exercise both strengthens physical strength and stamina, and improves many of the blood parameters (cholesterol, sugar, etc.) altered by a sedentary lifestyle and HIV infection (whether by the infection itself or by antiretroviral therapy).

Optimising physical exercise

- Regular intake of water or isotonic drinks is recommendable to prevent dehydration from liquid loss.
- Extreme exercise that may cause a loss of lean body mass should be avoided. Serious cases may lead to AIDS wasting syndrome.
- Exercises should be done properly to prevent injuries, as these may take longer to heal.
- Exercise may help people with heart disease but you should consult your doctor to make sure it involves no risk.

Some guidelines

A moderate exercise programme will help your body turn food into muscle. Take it easily and work exercises into your daily activities. Do not overstrain as this would remove some of the benefits of exercise.

Prepare a routine of at least 20 minutes, at least three times a week (as long as it makes you feel better). This can bring big improvements in your physical fitness. As your strength and energy grow, try to exercise for 45 minutes to an hour, three or four times a week.

Start exercising when you feel ready. This may help to put off the symptoms of HIV. Change your exercise routine to make it more dynamic. Look for fresh ways of keeping motivated to keep up your exercise programme. Look for someone to be your "exercise buddy".

It is very important to build your exercise programme up gradually to prevent injuries. Start with 10-minute sessions until you are able to extend them to an hour.

Eating and drinking correctly

Drinking enough liquid is very important when exercising. Remember that drinking tea, coffee, fizzy drinks, chocolate or alcohol may actually cause loss of body liquid.

Avoid eating when doing exercise. In fact, it is better to wait for up to 2 hours after eating before starting the exercise session. You should also wait for around an hour after exercise before eating. An apple or a piece of toast with jam can give you the energy boost you need.

Proper nutrition is also important. With an increase in physical activity you may need to consume more calories to prevent weight loss (See [InfoVIHtal #12 'Weight loss'](#)).

Choice of exercise

Start with an activity you like a lot. Whether it is yoga, running (jogging), or cycling, etc., doing something you like will help you to keep up the programme. Avoid falling into a routine!

It may be a good idea to alternate these types of exercise (known as cardiovascular or aerobic) with weights and strength exercises (anaerobic).

Aerobic exercise

This increases the effects of insulin, improves blood lipid levels, has cardiovascular benefits, and reduces the chronic inflammation associated with HIV. It is suitable for people with facial and limb fat loss, as it does not reduce this fat type.

Anaerobic exercise

This increases muscle mass, enhances the effects of insulin, and reduces subcutaneous fat (which is particularly suitable for people with an accumulation of visceral fat, known as lipohypertrophy).