

# Using gym equipment

## *A guide for heart patients*

Using equipment, either at home or in a gym setting, can be a great way to exercise. Examples of gym-based exercise equipment include exercise cycles, treadmills, cross trainers and rowers.

### What are the specific benefits of using gym equipment?

It offers variety through aerobic exercise machines to assist in improving cardiovascular fitness, and resistance machines to build strength.

It offers an individual exercise prescription where machines can be set to achieve specific goals.

The convenience can make it easier for you to commit to regular exercise.

If you have other medical conditions with movement limitations and balance/skill and coordination challenges, gym equipment can be adapted so that you can achieve the desired levels and intensities more easily and more safely.

### Gym equipment can maintain or improve

- Aerobic fitness & cardiovascular health
- Strength & flexibility
- Balance & co-ordination
- Psychological wellbeing

### When can I start using gym equipment?

When you can start depends on your cardiac diagnosis and whether it is appropriate for you to use a particular piece of equipment, as well as your general health and any co-existing medical conditions you may have. It is very important to inform your cardiac rehabilitation (CR) team that you wish to use gym equipment so they can help you plan a suitable individual exercise programme.

Your CR team will advise you when you are ready. This could be quite soon after your cardiac event and could form part of your CR programme.

### How can I get in shape?

The use of gym equipment can be tailored to all levels of ability. However, it may be recommended you attend some CR sessions before using gym equipment so you can become familiar with good exercise habits, learn how to exercise safely, and help you set a starting point.

### How should I feel during my session?

It is very important that you know how to exercise safely and effectively. If you have used gym equipment before, your programme may be different when you restart, especially if it has been a while since you have used the equipment.

Working comfortably at moderate intensity is recommended. High intensity exertion should be avoided as this may cause problems for some people. You should feel your breathing rate has increased but you should still feel comfortable and able to continue. It is fine to feel that you are exerting yourself so long as you are not struggling. As with any activity, start low and go slow, build up gradually and pace yourself.

*If you feel exhausted following exercise you may have worked too hard or for too long. Stop exercising if you experience any chest pain, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/or GTN spray/tablets seek medical advice immediately.*



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The CR team may calculate an individual training heart rate to help you exercise at the correct intensity; this can be useful if the gym equipment is able to monitor your heart rate. However these heart rate monitors are not always accurate so it is also important to rate how hard your effort is using the rate of perceived exertion scale as taught in the CR sessions.

Please note: if you are taking medications which affect your heart rate such as beta-blockers, the recommended heart rate ranges displayed on the machines for specific age groups will not be relevant and could cause you to work at a higher intensity than recommended.



## How should I structure a gym-based exercise session?

The exercises in the first 15 minutes and last 10 minutes of the session should be performed at a lower intensity. A warm up and cool down allows your heart rate and blood pressure to rise gradually as the exercise intensity increases and then fall gradually as it decreases as you finish your session.

**Warm up.** Minimum of 15 minutes.

The exercise should feel 'light' intensity. Gradually increase the exercise intensity to a light to moderate exertion. Don't use your arms alone to warm up. Machines suitable to warm up are the static bike or treadmill

**Aerobic workout.** Static bike, treadmill, cross-trainer, stepper and rowing machines are examples of gym equipment that can be used. Aim to build up to at least 20 -30 minutes of moderate intensity activity following your warm up. Once you are comfortable with a minimum of 20-30 minutes continuous aerobic activity you can consider progression by increasing first the frequency of how often you are using the equipment and then the pace or resistance on the machine.

**Cool down.** Minimum of 10 minutes. You can cool down on the equipment you are finishing on or chose another aerobic machine. Gradually lower the intensity until you feel completely recovered or your heart rate is near your usual resting rate.

Most people warm up and cool down using the gym equipment but you may prefer to walk round instead. You can also incorporate stretching exercises into the cool down whilst your muscles are still warm.

**Resistance/ strength training.** Ask your CR team for the ACPICR Resistance Training leaflet, see <http://www.acpicr.com/publications>, to learn how and when to add in this element. If you plan to use the weight machines or free weights at the end of the session you should complete a partial (5 minute) cool down on the last piece of aerobic equipment to lower your heart rate before starting the resistance work.

## Other things to consider

- Speak to an instructor before using a new gym to make sure you know how to use the equipment safely. If you have used a gym previously you should inform the instructor of your change in health so that they can support you as you return
- If you are using equipment at home, make sure it is in good working order and the room is not too hot or cold
- Avoid long rests between equipment
- Avoid holding your breath or over-gripping when using the equipment.
- Exercise only when you feel well
- Dress appropriately
- Don't exercise straight after eating a large meal
- Remember to keep hydrated during your workout
- Exercising to music using earphones can be motivational but make sure you choose music that suits your pace and doesn't cause you to overwork
- Don't try to compete with other gym users, stick to your planned routine at your own pace
- There may be an exercise referral scheme you can access at your local gym once you have finished the CR programme. Speak to your CR team about this



This guidance is based on available evidence and expert opinion.

Produced by the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Cardiac Rehabilitation [www.acpicr.com](http://www.acpicr.com).

This leaflet is not intended to replace the advice that your doctor or cardiac rehabilitation team give you based on their expert knowledge of your condition.

Due for review 2021.