

# Exercising with Heart Trouble

## ***Why Do You Need to Exercise?***

Your heart and your body need exercise to stay fit. Regular exercise is an important way to reduce the risk of developing heart failure. It is also a way to improve health and well-being after you have heart failure.

If you have heart failure, mild to moderate exercise can have a good effect on your health. Exercise also increases good (HDL) cholesterol, lowers blood pressure, helps control diabetes, promotes weight loss, and reduces the risk of heart attacks.

## ***What Do You Need to Do Before You Start Exercising?***

Before you start exercising, check with your doctor. Your doctor may suggest that you start with an exercise test. This test monitors your heart rhythm and blood pressure during exercise to make sure that exercise is safe for you.

Your doctor may also suggest that you start your exercise with a hospital-based program called “cardiac (KAR de ak) rehabilitation.” This is very helpful if you feel very weak or very anxious about starting an exercise routine.

If you have a specific disability, such as a bad knee, exercise still has value. But it is important to discuss the problem with your doctor or with a therapist to determine the safest types of exercise for you.

***What Types of Exercise Are Helpful?***

Many types of exercise can help you keep your heart healthy. You can walk, swim, dance, or participate in some other type of physical activity that you like.

You can also use stationary exercise bicycles, treadmills, and other such machines. These machines make it easier to exercise in several short time periods, which is often the safest way.

Doing different activities may make exercise less boring. Try to find a place and an activity that you like. Few people stick with an exercise routine they don't like, no matter how good it is for them.

Be creative. Exercise while you watch your favorite TV show or listen to music. Find a way to enjoy it!

***What Should You Do Before Exercising?***

Start slowly, and then try to gradually increase the length of your exercise time. Do sitting stretches before you start and when you finish. See the attached handout "Exercising with Heart Trouble: Stretches" for stretching exercises you can do.

Start at an easy pace for 5 minutes, at least 3 times a week. Then increase your time by a minute each week (6 minutes each session in the second week). Set a goal of at least 20 minutes of exercise 3 times a week. Don't worry about missing a day now and then.

***What Are Some Useful Exercise Pointers?***

Here are some ways to make your exercise enjoyable, safe, and helpful.

- Exercise at a comfortable pace. Work fast enough to break a sweat, but not so fast you can't talk.

**What Are Some Useful Exercise Pointers?  
continued**

- Exercise with a partner in a cool setting. Shopping malls are great in the summer.
- Always wait an hour after you eat or take your medications.
- Take a cell phone if you are exercising away from home.
- If you must exercise alone, consider taking an emergency alert system (most hospitals can tell you where to get one).
- Stop exercising and consult your doctor if you develop unusual shortness of breath, heavy sweating, dizziness, chest pain or pressure, or heart pounding.
- Go to an emergency room if you keep having these symptoms.

**What Precautions Should You Take?**

Don't walk very fast or exercise very hard if you have heart failure. For heart failure patients, the common expression "no pain, no gain" is not true. Slow, comfortable, and enjoyable exercise is best and will help you the most.

The benefits of exercise increase with the amount of time you spend at it. Remember, the time spent exercising is more important than how far or how fast you do it. Don't overdo it!

**Glossary**

Term	Pronunciation	Definition
<b>Cardiac Rehabilitation</b>	KAR de ak	A comprehensive exercise, education, and behavioral modification program designed to improve the physical and emotional condition of patients with heart disease

# Exercising with Heart Trouble: Stretches

The following are some sitting stretches you should do before you start and when you finish exercising.

## ***Stretches While Lying Down***

### **Ankle Pumps**

Lie flat on the floor. Pump one foot by pointing your toes away from your body and the back toward the ceiling. Repeat with the other foot.

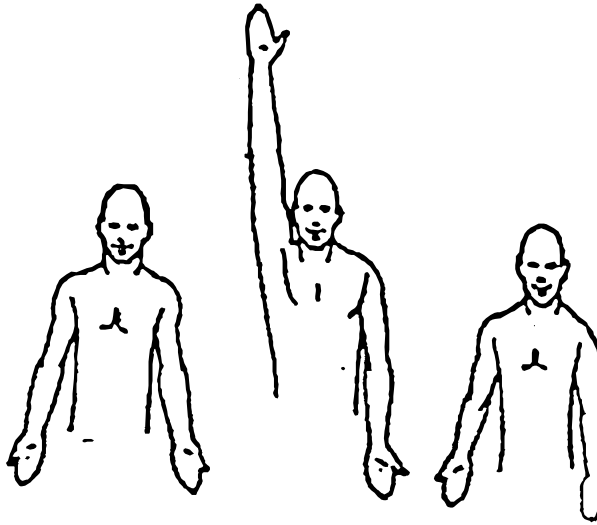
These pumps can be done in a sitting position also. Point your toes toward the floor and then toward the ceiling.



**Stretches While  
Sitting**

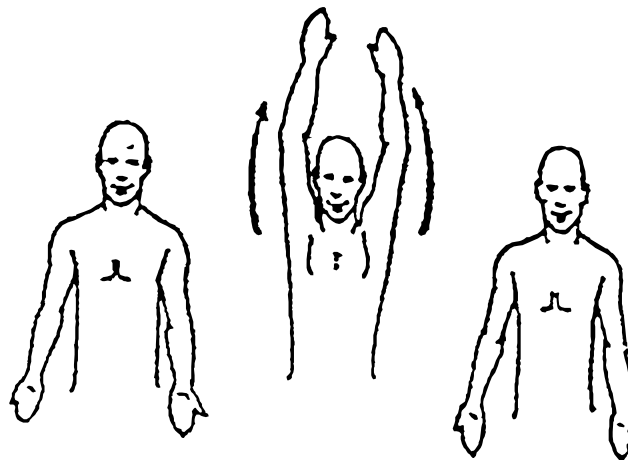
**Arm Raise**

Raise one arm above your head as high as possible. Slowly lower your arm to your side. Repeat with the other arm.



**Double Arm Raise**

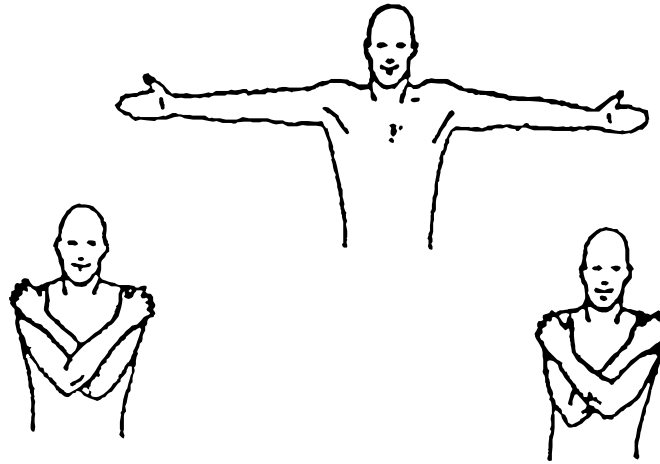
Raise both arms above your head. Slowly lower your arms to your sides.



**Stretches While  
Sitting  
continued**

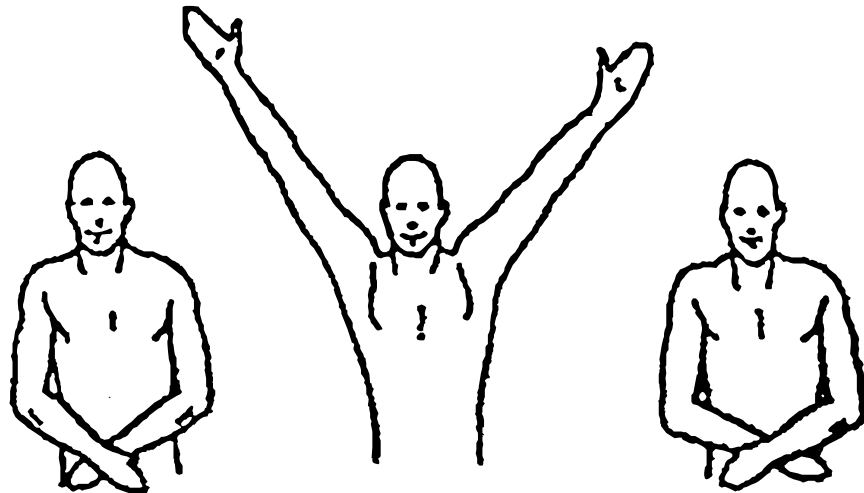
**Arm Hug**

Spread your arms out. Then give yourself a hug. Repeat.



**Arm Cross**

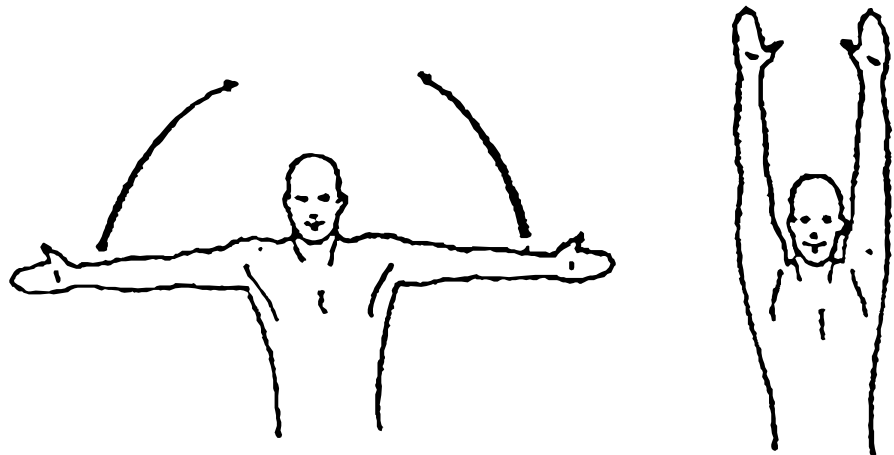
Cross your arms in your lap. Uncross your arms as you lift them up and out. Slowly lower and re-cross your arms.



**Stretches While  
Sitting  
continued**

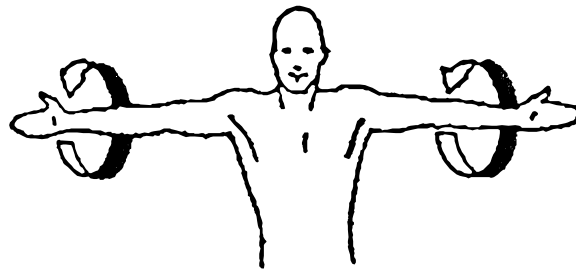
**Side Arm Raise**

Start with your arms out to your sides, at shoulder height. Lift your arms out above your head and back down.



**Arm Circles**

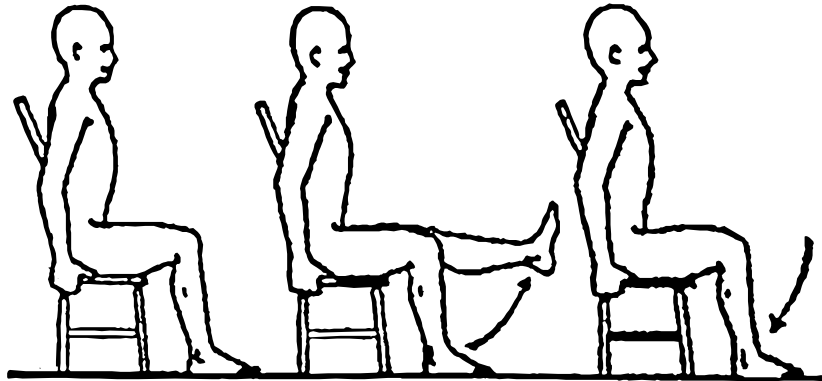
Lift arms out to your sides, at shoulder height. Keeping your arms at shoulder height, circle them forward and then backward.



**Stretches While  
Sitting  
continued**

**Leg Lifts**

Extend one leg straight out, and then slowly lower the leg. Repeat with the other leg.



**Knee Lifts**

Raise one knee toward your chest, and then lower it to the floor. Alternate knees as if you are marching in place.

