

# Exercise a great prescription to help older hearts

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(HealthDay)—Regular exercise is potent medicine for older adults with

heart disease, a new American Heart Association scientific statement says.

Physical activity should be a key part of care for [older adults](#) with heart disease who want to reduce their symptoms and build their stamina, said geriatric cardiologist Dr. Daniel Forman. He's chair of the panel that wrote the new statement.

"Many health-care providers are focused only on the medical management of diseases—such as heart failure, heart attacks, valvular [heart disease](#) and strokes—without directly focusing on helping patients maximize their physical function," Forman said in a heart association news release.

Yet, after a heart attack or other cardiac event, patients need to gain strength. Their independence may require the ability "to lift a grocery bag and to carry it to their car," said Forman, a professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System.

"Emphasizing physical function as a fundamental part of therapy can improve [older patients'](#) quality of life and their ability to carry out activities of daily living," he added.

And, no one is too old to get moving. "Patients in their 70s, 80s and older can benefit," Forman said.

Cardiac rehabilitation is a crucial tool for elderly patients, providing exercise counseling and training to promote heart health, and manage stress and depression. But Forman said it's not prescribed often enough.

"When treating cardiac patients in their 70s, 80s and 90s, health-care providers often stress medications and procedures without considering

the importance of getting patients back on their feet, which is exactly what cardiac rehabilitation programs are designed to do," he noted.

Daily walking and tackling more chores at home also can be helpful, Forman said. Resistance training and balance training can help prevent falls. Tai chi and yoga employ strength, balance and aerobic features, he explained.

The statement also outlines ways for [heart](#) doctors to assess [patients'](#) levels of physical functioning.

The statement was published March 23 in the journal *Circulation*.

Heart disease in older Americans is a growing concern because the number of people 65 and older in the United States is expected to double between 2010 and 2050.

**More information:** The U.S. National Library of Medicine offers advice for [being active when you have heart disease](#).

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