

Q&A: Exercise is important for body, mind

April 7 2020, by From Mayo Clinic News Network



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DEAR MAYO CLINIC: Can I continue to exercise even if I don't feel well, or should I hold off until I start to feel better?

ANSWER: The answer to that question depends largely on what's wrong. For example, if you have symptoms of the common cold, it's usually fine

to keep exercising. It may even help you feel a little better. If you have a fever or other more [severe symptoms](#), it's best to put your [exercise](#) routine on hold until those symptoms go away.

Exercise is important for your body and mind. Regular exercise can help you maintain a healthy weight, keep your [blood sugar](#) and [blood cholesterol levels](#) in check, increase bone strength and help manage stress, just to name a few benefits.

For [healthy adults](#), the recommendation is 150 minutes of aerobic exercise each week. That includes activities such as running, biking, jogging, swimming, brisk walking and dancing. Many people break up their weekly aerobic activity into 30-minute sessions, five days a week. In addition, your [exercise routine](#) should include at least two 20- to 30-minute sessions of strength training a week, which many people have a tendency to forget. Remember, too, that even if you don't get to the recommended level of exercise sometimes, any amount of exercise, even if it's just 10 minutes of walking, has benefits.

When you're not feeling well, it's still fine to exercise in some cases. A good rule of thumb to follow is if you have symptoms above the neck, such as a [runny nose](#), sneezing, [nasal congestion](#) or a minor sore throat, you're OK to exercise. In those cases, exercise may even help you feel better by opening up your nasal passages. However, you may want to reduce the intensity and length of your workout, and limit group activities.

Instead of running, for example, go for a walk. If you work out when you're having some symptoms of illness, make sure you stay attuned to your body's need for fluid. Drink to your level of thirst. Be aware that if it's warm outside, you may need to take in more fluid than usual.

If you have symptoms of illness that affect you below the neck, such as

chest congestion, a hacking cough, muscle aches, fatigue or an upset stomach, it's best to take a break from exercising for a few days.

If you have a fever, you also should give your body some time to rest and recover. A fever is your body's way of telling you to slow down, and it's important to listen to that. As you recover after these kinds of symptoms, go a bit slower and decrease the intensity of your workout when you return to exercising.

Due to the current recommendations for social distancing during the COVID-19 outbreak, your fitness center may be closed. Even if it's not, you may want consider skipping the gym and take your workout outdoors instead, or explore new exercise options that you can do at home. Regardless of where you exercise, don't forget to wipe off equipment, including bikes, weights, benches and yoga mats, after you're done with them.

If you exercise when you're not feeling well, and then you experience additional pain or symptoms when you exercise—or if you have other concerns or questions about exercising when you're ill—talk with your health care provider.

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Citation: Q&A: Exercise is important for body, mind (2020, April 7) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-qa-important-body-mind.html>

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