

CARDIO EXERCISE 101

An essential component of the Mediterranean lifestyle that leads to desirable health outcomes is physical activity. The American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes per day of moderate exercise 5 days per week for heart health. Walking and running are excellent cardio workouts and can be considered moderate or rigorous, depending on the speed and incline.

Here are 8 steps to get you started on the right track:

1. **Buy the right shoes.** Wear them around the house to break them in before you hit the road.
2. **Set a starting goal,** whether it be running or walking for 1 mile or keeping pace for 30 minutes.
3. **Warm up and cool down.** Start and end with stretches and a warm up/cool down walk.
4. **Breathe** on rhythm with your pace, in through the nose and out through the mouth. This can be difficult when your breathing gets heavy, but this helps strengthen your lungs in addition to your heart.
5. **Pay attention to your form.** When getting started, keep your shoulders pulled back and down, head up and core pulled in. Practicing this posture makes it easier to keep correct form as you progress.
6. **Plan your meals and snacks.** Here are some examples:
 - Before a morning workout, eat a small carbohydrate-rich snack, such as a granola bar.
 - Before an evening workout, eat a substantial lunch a few hours before, such as a grilled chicken Greek salad.
 - After your workouts, eat complex carbohydrates and protein, such as Greek yogurt and berries or a salmon grain bowl.
 - Hydrate with every meal and snack. Water is best, but if you are exercising for over an hour at high intensity then you may consider a sports drink with electrolytes.
7. **Track your progress.** You may not know how much you've improved without keeping track of things such as your distance, time, speed, posture, pace, breathing and enjoyment.
8. **Be proud of yourself every step of the way.** Any effort you make is more than you would have done if you hadn't tried!

As you progress, consider increasing the intensity with interval training: short, high-energy pushes followed by an equal or longer length recovery period. Start out with a 3-minute brisk warm-up walk. Alternate between 1 minute of brisk walking and 1 minute of jogging or sprinting. Continue this for 6 repetitions and finish with a cool-down walk. Practicing interval training can help to increase your pace and endurance over time.

Use these tips to find the exercise patterns that work best for you and make adjustments over time based on your improvements.