

## Exercise Protects Against Heart Disease by Lowering Stress

A study led by investigators at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) revealed that a reduction in stress-related brain activity may be behind some of exercise's heart health benefits.<sup>1</sup> Those with higher levels of physical activity had lower stress-related activity in the brain and a 23% lower risk of developing cardiovascular disease compared to those who didn't exercise regularly.<sup>2</sup> Stress signals in the brain are linked to inflammation, hardening or thickening of the arteries, increased blood pressure and higher sympathetic nervous system activity.<sup>5</sup>

### Exercise's Heart Benefits Even Greater for Those With Depression

*"Physical activity was roughly twice as effective in lowering cardiovascular disease risk among those with depression. Effects on the brain's stress-related activity may explain this novel observation."*

### What's the Sweet Spot for Exercise?

Most Americans don't exercise enough, but it's important to find that sweet spot when it comes to exercise dosing. Exercise too little and you'll miss out on important benefits, but [exercise too much](#) or too vigorously and you also risk harming your health.

If you're sedentary and begin to exercise, you get a dose-dependent decrease in mortality, diabetes, depression, high blood pressure, coronary disease, osteoporosis, sarcopenia, falls and more. But people who are doing the highest volume of vigorous exercise start losing longevity benefits. If you're doing full-distance triathlons when you're in your 40s and 50s, your risk of atrial fibrillation increases by 500% to 800%.

However, in the case of moderate exercise — loosely defined as exercising to the point where you're slightly winded but can still carry on a conversation — there's clear evidence that more IS better and cannot be overdone. Perhaps even more surprising, moderate exercise, which includes walking, also improves all-cause survival better than vigorous exercise — about two times better, according to O'Keefe. *Optimal benefits are achieved at approximately 150 minutes/week.*