

Research studies have shown that physical, mental and social stimulation can improve quality of life for people affected by Huntington disease (HD). With a little bit of planning and preparation, as well as setting realistic expectations, exercising with HD can be a safe and rewarding experience.

Moderate physical activity (a level at which you are able to hold a conversation) can help improve muscle function, balance and co-ordination, plus increase endurance. It also reduces anxiety and depression and promotes a feeling of well-being. Overall, being more active may help improve:

- Quality of life
- Walking farther or faster
- Balance
- Symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Stress
- Confidence

Choosing exercises you prefer will make it easier to start a program, and you are more likely to stay motivated and active. Build exercise into your daily routine and involve support from friends and family members when possible. Instead of trying many exercises, select two to three simple ones. This approach is easier to learn, remember and do.

## Exercise Tips

- Set specific and achievable goals
- Develop a plan that will be easy to follow and maintain
- Start slowly and reward yourself for carrying through with the plan

Exercise can take a variety of forms including:

- Active or passive
- Social or solitary
- Spontaneous or planned

Exercise can be part of your everyday life and involve different aspects, including:

- Thinking skills
- Emotional well-being
- Physical abilities
- Mind/body connection
- Personal preference: choose an activity you enjoy

Exercise and activity can improve physical symptoms in HD by:

- Increasing muscle tone and strength
- Improving balance
- Leading to better quality of sleep
- Promoting overall good health

Think of the brain like a muscle - the more you use it, the better it gets. Exercise can enhance the growth of new brain cells, memory and thinking skills. Try a new activity; it can be intellectually challenging. Revisit old leisure interests or try doing current interests differently.

## Improving Emotional Symptoms in HD

Exercise and activity:

- Energize and make you feel good (releasing endorphins in the body)
- Promote feelings of calm
- Have been shown to help with depression, anxiety, stress and self-esteem

## What Can Physical Activity and Exercise Include?

There are many ways of achieving positive outcomes from physical activity. To have the greatest impact, gear an exercise program to your individual preferences and abilities.

Try to include the following in an exercise program:

- Warmup and Cool down
- Exercises that develop muscular strength or improve balance and functional skills (e.g., yoga, free weights or exercise bands)
- Cardiovascular session (e.g., walking, exercise bike or working out in the pool)

Some examples of exercise and activities you can try are:

- |           |                     |                |                    |
|-----------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| • Walking | • Aquatic exercises | • Yoga         | • Guided breathing |
| • Tai chi | • Exercise bike     | • Lawn bowling | • Modified golfing |

## Safety Precautions

Before starting a new exercise plan, talk to your doctor. The doctor may refer you to a physiotherapist for an assessment or consultation.

Knowing how to use the equipment safely and how to perform each exercise correctly is very important. A physiotherapist familiar with HD can offer education and adapt the program and movements as needed. Because the symptoms of HD can include involuntary movements, reduced coordination, and problems with balance, not all equipment may be suitable. Use adapted equipment as needed.

Reassessment of the exercise program on a regular basis by the physician or physiotherapist is important to ensure the exercise routine suits your needs and functional abilities – especially as symptoms of HD change and progress. You can also connect with the Resource Centre Director (RCD) in your region to learn exercise options in your area.

## RESOURCES

Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines | [www.csepguidelines.ca](http://www.csepguidelines.ca)

HSC Resource Centre Directors (RCD): [www.huntingtonsociety.ca/family-services-team-list/](http://www.huntingtonsociety.ca/family-services-team-list/)

Informational fact sheets for family and friends impacted by HD: [www.hdfactsheets.ca](http://www.hdfactsheets.ca)

Healthcare professionals and caregivers needing a more in depth understanding on HD: [www.huntingtonsociety.ca/hd-booklets-and-publications/](http://www.huntingtonsociety.ca/hd-booklets-and-publications/)