

# Along with antiretroviral medications, doctors may prescribe exercise for people with HIV

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In addition to antiretroviral medications, people with HIV may soon begin receiving a home exercise plan from their doctors, according to a researcher at Case Western Reserve University's Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing.

"People with HIV are developing secondary chronic illnesses earlier and more frequently than their non-HIV counterparts," said Allison Webel, PhD, RN, assistant professor of nursing. "And heart disease is one for which they are especially at risk."

An estimated 1.2 million people nationally live with HIV, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Studies have shown that people with HIV can engage in a variety of moderate to intensive physical exercises that result in a range of benefits, from lower cholesterol to better cognitive and mental health outcomes.

But a search of research literature turned up just two programs specifically designed for people with HIV to exercise at home.

With the long-term goal of creating a new evidence-based, home-exercise intervention that doctors can share with HIV patients, researchers from Case Western Reserve, Kent State University and University Hospitals Case Medical Center wanted to first find out

whether people with HIV even exercise at home.

They recruited 102 HIV patients to study their weekly exercise habits and found that most did exercise, but not intensely enough.

According to *The Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care* article, "A Cross-Sectional Description of Age and Gender Differences in Exercise Patterns in Adults Living with HIV," the researchers found that women exercised an average of 2.4 hours a week and men for 3.5 hours. The predominant exercise was walking, followed by climbing stairs, stretching and lifting weights.

Remove walking from the routine and the amount of time women spent exercising per week fell to 1.1 hours. They found that men exercised longer, but less strenuously than the women.

The American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercises five days a week, or 25 minutes of vigorous exercises three days a week and moderate muscle strengthening at least two days a week.

The study's participants were all on antiretroviral therapies, had an average age of 48 and were predominantly African-American (83 percent). They had lived with HIV for slightly more than 13 years and were on antiretroviral therapy for more than nine years. Most (80 percent) had a co-occurring health condition. Depression and hypertension topped the list.

Each had his or her height, weight and vital signs measured at the beginning of the study. All were asked to complete a computer survey of social and demographic questions and keep a seven-day diary to document daily exercise and its duration, frequency and intensity.

Now that the researchers know people with HIV [exercise](#) at home, Webel said the next step is to design a flexible plan that meets people at their initial levels and helps them progress to more intensive levels to maximize the health benefits of exercising.

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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