

# How to Measure Your Effort With Daily Activities and Exercise

## Post-COVID-19

Interdisciplinary Clinical Care Network  
Recovery | Care | Research | Education

► While you recover from COVID-19 it is important to **monitor your effort during daily activities** (washing, dressing, shopping etc.) **or exercise to make sure that you don't become too tired.**



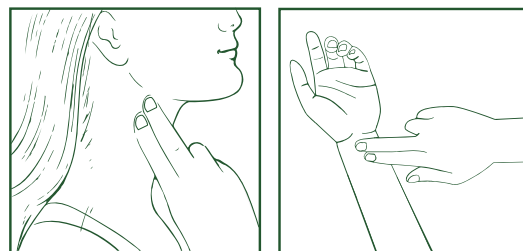
Ideally, when doing activities or exercise, you should aim for **no more than “moderate effort”**— you are breathing a little bit harder and your heart is beating faster but not to the point that you are breathless or your heart is pounding.

**There are 2 main ways to check how hard your body is working during activity or exercise:**

1. **Heart rate** – how many times your heart beats over one minute.
2. **Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE)** – how hard you think you are pushing yourself during activity or exercise.

### Heart Rate

You can measure your **heart rate (pulse)** by *counting the number of times you feel your heart beat*, using 2 fingers placed lightly on either your neck (just under end of your jaw bone) or wrist (in the small space under your thumb), *for 1 minute*. If you have a smart watch or wearable fitness tracker you can simply check the heart rate records.





A 'moderate effort' for activity or exercise should keep your heart rate at about 50%-70% of the maximum heart rate recommended for your age. The table below shows examples of the maximal heart rate and 50-70% of your maximal heart rate based on your gender and age. For example, if you are a 60-year-old male, when exercising, your 'target' heart rate should be between 80-112 beats per minute (which is 50-70% of the recommended maximum heart rate of 160 beats per minute). This means that you should try to work a little harder if your heart rate is below 80 beats per minute but ease up on your effort if your heart rate is more than 112 beats

per minute. When recovering from COVID, aim to keep at this level of effort for 5 minutes then gradually add 1-2 minutes per day to eventually exercise for a total of 30 minutes.

If you have symptoms of, or have been diagnosed with, Post Exertional Malaise (PEM), please speak with your doctor or physiotherapist before trying to increase your activity. PEM is an abnormal response to minimal levels of physical, cognitive, or social/emotional/spiritual exertion. Stop, rest and pace yourself if your symptoms get worse with even a tiny increase in activity. More information can be found on the [PHSA website](#).

| AGE   |   | 20        | 30       | 40       | 50       | 60       | 70       | 80      | 90      |
|-------|---|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|
| MEN   | Maximum heart rate                      | 200       | 190      | 180      | 170      | 160      | 150      | 140     | 130     |
|       | 50 - 70% of maximum heart rate (Target) | 100 - 140 | 95 - 133 | 90 - 126 | 85 - 119 | 80 - 112 | 75 - 105 | 70 - 98 | 65 - 91 |
| WOMEN | Maximum heart rate                      | 188       | 179      | 170      | 162      | 154      | 145      | 136     | 127     |
|       | 50 - 70% of maximum heart rate (Target) | 94 - 132  | 89 - 125 | 85 - 119 | 81 - 113 | 77 - 108 | 73 - 102 | 68 - 95 | 64 - 89 |

## Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE)

Another way of estimating your effort is by using the Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE). This means you choose the level of effort that is based on how you feel during activities or exercise. Try to aim for a moderate effort. The table below gives you an idea of how this will feel (you should feel "Strong effort, speech possible with some difficulty"). You can test yourself by simply trying to talk – if you are exercising so hard that you can't say a sentence without stopping part way for a breath, then you are exercising too hard and you should ease off a little bit. Check yourself when doing daily activities (such as bathing, dressing) or during exercise.

| Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) | Description of effort  | Example of how you will feel  |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| 6                                  | Nothing                | No effort, sitting and doing nothing.   |
| 7-8                                | Very very light        | Effort just noticeable, speech unaffected from rest.  |
| 9-10                               | Very light             | Walking slowly at your own pace, comfortable speech possible.   |
| 11                                 | Fairly light           | Still feels like enough energy to keep exercising, comfortable speech possible.                                   |
| 12-14                              | Moderate/somewhat hard | Strong effort, speech possible with some difficulty.  |
| 15-16                              | Hard                   | Very strong effort, speech limited to short phrases.  |
| 17-18                              | Very hard              | You can go on but need to push yourself, feels very heavy and you're very tired, speech limited to short phrases. |
| 19                                 | Very very hard         | Most strenuous exercise you have ever done, speech difficult.   |
| 20                                 | Maximal                | Exhaustion.   |

## When to stop activity or exercise

If you feel any of the symptoms below, it is best to stop what you are doing and see a doctor:

- New or worsening chest pain or heart palpitations
- Nausea
- New headache
- Feeling light-headed, dizzy or passing out
- Difficulty catching your breath
- Profound fatigue
- Swelling in both legs/feet or arms/hands
- Tunnel vision or loss of vision



If you have any questions about how to monitor your effort during activity or need guidance in returning to or progressing activity, please speak with a health-care professional such as a doctor or physiotherapist (to find a BC physiotherapist, visit [www.bcphysio.org/find-a-physio](http://www.bcphysio.org/find-a-physio)).

For more information on how to support your understanding and management of symptoms as you recover from COVID-19, please visit [www.phsa.ca/health-info/post-covid-19-care-recovery](http://www.phsa.ca/health-info/post-covid-19-care-recovery)