- Exercise

Young at heart

HOW TO BOOST CARDIO HEALTH IN LATER LIFE, BY CAMILLA FOSTER

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THE beginning of a new year represents a fresh start and many of us have taken up healthy habits – but have you considered your heart?



Why is exercise so important?

“Your heart is a muscle, so you want to get it working and anything that makes your heart rate go up is going to do that,” says Emily McGrath, senior cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation. “Exercise helps lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels which reduces your risk for developing type two diabetes and heart and circulatory diseases. It also helps you maintain a healthy weight, which can help reduce your risk of heart attacks and strokes.”

Staying active relieves stresser

“Stress is very strongly linked to people being more likely to pick up bad habits, such as eating badly and not doing any exercise, so we want people to be doing as much as they can to stay active,” says Emily

What activities are particularly beneficial for heart health?

“Aerobic exercise and strength training are both very important,” says Emily. “The national guidelines recommend doing over 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise each week, which means that you are out of breath but can still talk.”

Here are five fun activities to boost your heart health in 2026...

1. WALKING

“The reason walking is so good is that you often do it with somebody else and I think that really helps motivate people,” says Emily.

The British Heart Foundation has launched a Walk for Hearts challenge which is encouraging people to get out walking and raise money for lifesaving research this February. “We are encouraging people to take part and walk 28, 50 or 100 miles in the month of February,” says Emily.

2. SWIMMING

“Swimming is great because it’s a full body workout, but it’s low impact,” says Emily. “It’s not weight bearing, so it gives you that full body workout without putting additional strain on injuries or joint issues.”

3. CYCLING

“Cycling is fantastic because it gets your heart rate up. You’re strength building and doing an aerobic workout at the same time,” says Emily. “There’s also less impact on your joints.”

4. DANCE CLASSES

“Dance is a very fun aerobic focus exercise and is going to get your heart rate up,” says Emily. “In a class like Zumba, you’re going to be doing some elements of strength as well, but they’re disguised as dance movement. So you might do a squat, but it’s part of a dance routine. It’s just so much fun that you often don’t feel like you’re working out.”

She adds: “Group classes offer a sense of belonging and fun which I think is really important.”

5. STRENGTH TRAINING

“The stronger you are, the better your balance is, the better your core strength is, the more able you’re going to be to exercise and do more to get your heart rate up,” says Emily. You can do strength training with your body weight, with weights or resistance bands.

“You can do things like heel raises, sitting to stand or glute bridges at home with minimal or no equipment,” says Emily. “Resistance bands can help stretch and challenge your muscles a bit.”