

Get cozy: How to exercise at home

Icy roads? Gym too far away? Or are you just not a people person? Cozy cardio may be right for you.

What is cozy cardio?

Clare Spires, an exercise physiologist at OSF HealthCare, says cozy cardio, in simple terms, is a way to make exercise comfortable in your home. It's wise to talk to a health care provider about what workout is right for you. But generally, cozy cardio offers some freedom. For example, you can work up a sweat with an instructional video or app. Or you can just find a routine that works for you.

Equipment

Spires says you don't have to rush out and buy equipment. But if you like having something to hold or press your feet to, there are options.

Walking pads have become popular. These are miniature treadmills with just the bottom structure. There are no rails and monitor at eye level like a traditional treadmill.

"Some can do inclines," Spires says. "You can put it under a desk if you're a remote worker. It's just another way to get those steps in during the day without leaving your house."

A small set of weights can be a welcome addition. Skip the 50 or 100-pound weights, Spires says. Two to five pounders are a good start.

"If you're doing some bigger muscle groups like biceps and quads, you could add more weight," Spires says. "But typically, those at-home workouts are made that you can lift weights with something like a soup can or a water bottle."

Keep that water bottle handy for hydration, too. And a mat can help with balance.

Safety

Gyms typically have safety measures and employees watching out for injuries or emergencies. During cozy cardio, you could be alone in an environment that wasn't meant for exercise. Think of a cluttered living room.

So, Spires says to do a safety check before each workout. Remove trip hazards like cords and rugs.

"If you could use a little extra stability, maybe work out next to a counter that you can hold onto. Avoid something that's going to move on you quickly," Spires advises.

Exercise with someone, if possible. Have a phone nearby in case you need to call 9-1-1. Start slow, and work up to your goals.

How much?

The American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week, spread out over several days. For those with that goal in mind, many do 30 minutes of sweat-building for five days per week. Others do 50 minutes per day for three days. Spires says you can have some cardio days and some weightlifting days. She says it's good to mix it up.

Spires says when defining "moderate intensity," think about singing a song while working out. If the strain of the workout means you can't sing without running out of breath, you're at moderate intensity. "Vigorous" would be an activity above that, like running.

It's a process, but Spires says the benefits are worth it. Regular exercise means lower blood pressure, cholesterol, chance of diabetes and chance of heart disease. You might also see improved mood and sleep.