

Why workout timing matters

It's common knowledge that exercise is good for you. But recent research suggests the timing of when you work out may provide additional health benefits you didn't expect.

Researchers released a [new study](#) in the British Medical Journal's (BMJ) Open Heart publication focused on timing workouts due to the participant's internal clock. So, what does that mean?

Darrel Gumm, MD, vice president of OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute in Peoria, Illinois, explains, "If we sync that exercise to a person's natural circadian rhythm, there's even more additional benefit on top of what you're already getting," Dr. Gumm says about the recent study. **"So, if you're a morning person, work out in the morning. If you're a morning person working out at night, you're going to get a benefit, but it won't be as profound as doing that in the morning. Vice versa, if you're a night person and you work out in the morning, you're going to get a benefit, but not as much as if you timed it to your natural circadian rhythm and when you're most alert."**

Dr. Gumm says timing your exercise according to when you're most alert benefits all our modifiable risk factors but especially helps lower our blood pressure. And the best part is, you are your body's top expert. Knowing whether you're a morning person or a night owl will help you decide when to schedule your exercise.

The type of exercise this study revealed to be better during your natural circadian rhythm were aerobic exercises, which is exercise that works your muscles repeatedly and in a rhythm. "It was a five-minute warmup, 30-minute workout, five-minute cool down," Dr. Gumm adds.

A study like this offers physicians like Dr. Gumm and other cardiologists at OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute an opportunity to share the research findings with people they see in the clinic and make personalized recommendations for modifying their lifestyle. Knowing whether someone is a morning person or night owl can help tailor the care and recommendations they receive.

"It's a great opportunity to emphasize the importance of physical activity. It's easy for us to ignore it, put it to the side and forget about it. But our standard recommendation is 30 minutes a day, five days a week," Dr. Gumm says. "If you can do 150 minutes a week, you're really getting a benefit."

The greatest impact the study reveals, Dr. Gumm says, was on lowering participants' systolic blood pressure. These 150 people were adults in Pakistan, between the ages of 40 and 60, who mainly live sedentary lifestyles.

"But even LDL cholesterol (bad cholesterol) showed a bigger drop in those who aligned their workout time with their circadian rhythm," Dr. Gumm says. "It dropped in both groups, whether you were aligned or not, but there was a bigger drop in the aligned group."

Exercise also helps increase HDL cholesterol, or the healthy cholesterol. It can also help drop a person's triglyceride level, which in turn can increase their HDL levels. Avoiding simple carbohydrates like white rice, white bread, pasta, sugar, potatoes and alcohol can decrease your triglyceride levels and bump up your HDL levels, Dr. Gumm points out.

If you can't make time for 150 minutes of exercise a week, Dr. Gumm recommends "exercise snacking." Examples are walking up and down three flights of stairs, three times a day, three days a week. Parking your car a little further from the office and getting in extra steps – simple things that you can modify easily into your daily routine.

To find a provider or schedule an appointment with the cardiology team at OSF Cardiovascular Institute, visit the OSF HealthCare [website](#).