



Should I exercise when I'm sick?

While it is important to take it easy when your body is fighting an infection, there are times when a light exercise could be beneficial.

Above the neck

If you experience symptoms above the neck, associated with an upper respiratory tract infection (URTI), such as a runny nose, nasal congestion, sneezing, or a minor sore throat, you should be okay to exercise lightly.

If you choose to train, keep the intensity, duration and volume below your normal levels. Listen to your body and make rational choices based on how you feel before, during and after training.

Physical activity can sometimes help to alleviate minor symptoms like nasal congestion and lethargy when you are suffering from a mild URTI. This happens as your respiratory tract and blood vessels dilate, which delivers more oxygen and nutrients throughout the body for energy.

Below the neck

If your symptoms are below the neck - tight chest, coughing or have a fever (your body temperature is 37.8 °C or above), you should avoid all exercise until your symptoms pass.

Other 'below the neck' symptoms to look out for include chest congestion, chills, an upset stomach, muscle or joint pain, or general fatigue. These symptoms generally indicate that you have a cold or flu virus.

Studies conducted on animals that were infected with a systemic virus found that engaging in physical activity while experiencing fever and pain worsened and prolonged symptoms.

Stop exercising immediately if you experience:

- Chest tightness or pressure
- Trouble breathing or excessive shortness of breath
- Light-headedness or dizziness
- Difficulty with balance

An infection can also become life-threatening in some cases because certain virus strains can cause myocarditis (inflammation of the heart wall), which can damage heart tissue. As such, the worst thing you can do when battling a severe illness or cold or flu virus is trying to sweat it out with exercise.

Do not exercise if your symptoms include:

- Chest congestion
- Coughing and/or wheezing
- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Joint pain
- General fatigue

Monitoring your resting heart rate every morning – manually or with a wearable device – can provide a heads up of infection.

Any reading that is 7-10 beats per minute higher than your normal resting heart rate could suggest that it is better to rest rather than train.



Training while taking medication to treat a cold or flu virus might cause other complications.

Research studies link certain antibiotic use with soft tissue injuries, specifically in tendons. Other potential issues may include gastrointestinal distress, including nausea and diarrhoea, fatigue (remember, your body is still fighting off an infection), and photosensitivity, which can increase your risk of sunburn.

For these reasons, and to allow your body time to recover, most doctors recommend that you stop exercising until your course of antibiotics is over.

Rest, relax, recuperate.