

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a white top and a dark watch, is smiling and holding a white tablet. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a couch and a plant.

Gentle Exercise for HF Patients

Jill Howie Esquivel, PhD, FNP

LOCATION/AFFILIATION

University of Virginia

APP(S), DEVICE(S), OR PLATFORM(S) USED

- Video conference platforms
- iPads

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

We provide a physical activity program for patients who have cardiac conditions such as heart failure, hypertension and atrial fibrillation. Physical activity such as walking and cardiac rehabilitation provide benefits for most people with cardiac conditions such as improved physical strength, balance and quality of life. Access to physical activity programs and gymnasiums is not always available or convenient, especially for people who have busy schedules, live in small communities or rural areas. Using video conference technology and iPad devices can open up opportunities for participation in physical activity at home or work.

In our program we provide each participant with an iPad that is set up by the Center for Telehealth with direct access links to daily physical activity classes. These classes are live and offered at various times of the day. Our participants are instructed on how to use the iPad and access the links. Video conference technology (examples are Zoom, Webex and Microsoft Teams) provides the platform for access to physical activity classes. Because the classes are live, the class instructors can provide the participants with feedback and various ways to engage in physical activity if they are limited by orthopedic problems. The participants learn a variety of ways to stretch, build strength and improve their wellbeing.

There are criteria for enrollment into the program. Some of the criteria include stable heart failure (no recent hospitalizations or changes in medications). Staff identify which patients are eligible by looking at the medical record just prior to patient appointments and then offer the program when they are at the clinic visit.

Our program also includes heart health education that can be accessed via the iPad. The patient education has been linked to various websites that provide information on heart healthy eating, treatments for cardiac conditions and resources for general health. Participants are in our program for six months and have benefitted by developing new ways to participate in exercise.