

EXERCISE

A Drug-Free Approach to Lowering Blood Pressure

Having high blood pressure and not getting enough exercise are closely related. Discover how small changes in your daily routine can make a big difference.

How exercise can lower your blood pressure

Regular activity makes your heart stronger. A stronger heart can pump more blood with less effort. If your heart can work less to pump blood the force on your arteries decreases, lowering your blood pressure. Additionally, being more physically active can lower your systolic blood pressure—this is the top number when reading your BP—by an average of 5-10 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg). That is as good as some blood pressure medications. You must maintain a healthy lifestyle of physical activity to keep your blood pressure low. It takes about one to three months for regular exercise to have an impact on your blood pressure.

If your blood pressure is at a desirable level — less than 120/80 mm Hg — exercise can keep it from rising as you age. Regular exercise also helps you maintain a healthy weight, another important way to control blood pressure.

How much exercise do you need?

Cardiovascular/aerobic, strength training, and flexibility are all an important part of an overall fitness program. Aerobic activity is the component most important because it is what helps in controlling high blood pressure. It does not take hours in the gym every day to see the benefits. Simply add in moderate physical activity to your daily routine to help. Examples of physical activity that increase your heart and breathing rate are: mowing the lawn, raking leaves, scrubbing the floor, going for a walk, taking an aerobic class, jogging, bicycling, and swimming.

Aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity most days of the week. If you are not able to set aside that much time at once split it up into two 15 minute sessions or three 10 minute sessions. Other ways to add physical activity to your day are taking the stairs instead of the elevator or going for a walk on your lunch break.

When you need your doctor's okay

It is best to talk with your doctor before you jump into an exercise program, especially if:

- You are a man older than age 40 or a woman older than age 50
- You smoke
- You are overweight
- You have a chronic health condition, such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- You have had a heart attack
- You have a family history of heart-related problems before age 55
- You feel pain in your chest or become dizzy with exertion
- You are unsure if you are in good health

For more information, contact:

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Keep it safe

To reduce the risk of injury while exercising start slowly. Remember to warm up before you exercise and cool down afterwards. Build up the intensity of your workouts gradually. If you would like to try strength training exercise, make sure you have your doctor's okay. Some exercises may increase your blood pressure — especially if you hold your breath while contracting your muscles.

Stop exercise and seek immediate medical care if you experience any of the following warning signs during physical activity:

- Chest pain or tightness
- Dizziness or faintness
- Pain in an arm or your jaw
- Severe shortness of breath
- An irregular heartbeat
- Excessive fatigue

Additional resources

- The American Council of Exercise provides helpful tips on how to [Make Time for Exercise Easy!](#)
- A [Walk a Day](#) has multiple health benefits!
- You can control high blood pressure without medication with these [10 Helpful Lifestyle Changes](#).
- WebMD provides you with practical [Exercise Tips for Getting Started](#).
- Useful [Exercise Tips](#) for those with high blood pressure.