

Being Active When You Have Hypertension

ACSM
EXERCISE IS
MEDICINE®

Regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do to help prevent, treat, and control hypertension (high blood pressure). High blood pressure increases your risk of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke - but being active lowers your risk of serious events by 25%.

In most people, blood pressure is immediately lower after a single bout of exercise - and this can last for up to 24 hours! These blood pressure changes are often greater in adults with higher blood pressures. In other words, exercise works best in those who stand to benefit the most!

Moderate-intensity aerobic activity and strength training (either alone or combined) are recommended for adults with high blood pressure. Be active on most, preferably all, days of the week to benefit from the instant blood pressure lowering effects of exercise each and every day.



Getting Started

Start Simple

Sit less and move around more! Walk the dog. Roll to the mailbox. Dance in the kitchen. Take the stairs. Find opportunities to move throughout the day.

Talk with Your Doctor

Ask your health care provider if there are any special considerations before starting or increasing physical activity—especially if you are currently inactive or plan to do vigorous exercise. Take your prescribed medication.

Be Active with a Friend

Do activities you enjoy and find an activity buddy at home or work. Those who exercise with a friend or family member tend to stick with it longer than those who go it alone.

Motivation

What will help you stick with it? Is there a better time of day? Would you do better in a supervised program or fitness center? Would being active with a friend help? What's fun for you?

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing. Build up to doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (like a brisk walk, light cycling, swimming or water exercise). You'll improve your stamina and heart health.

What?

Any rhythmic, continuous activity

How often?

5-7 days/week

How hard?

Fairly light to somewhat hard

How much?

Start w/ a few minutes. Gradually build up to 30+ minutes over the day.

Remember: Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20-30 minutes. Be active however and wherever you can. To lose weight, eat fewer calories and aim for 250 minutes/week.

High Blood Pressure Tips and Cautions

If possible, measure your blood pressure before activity. If it's above 160/100, check with your health care provider about getting better BP control before doing exercise. Ask your health care provider if you need to change your medication.

Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after activity, especially on a hot day or if you'll be going for a long time. Some medications (beta-blockers and diuretics) may affect your body's ability to handle hot, humid weather.

Strength Training

Moderate-intensity strength training, for example working with weights or resistance bands, can improve your blood pressure, make you stronger and help your overall health. Plus, strength training will make daily activities easier and safer, like lifting laundry baskets, propelling yourself in a wheelchair or yardwork.

What?

Hand weights, resistance bands, weight machines or your own body (for example, kitchen counter push-ups or chair squats).

How often?

2-3 days/week
*Rest day in between

How hard?

Start with light effort. Build up to somewhat hard effort.

How much?

Build up to 8-12 reps of challenging effort for each major muscle group. Repeat 2 - 4 times.

Remember: If you need it, get help from a certified exercise professional. They can teach you the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly.

To stay safe and injury free:

- Start with light to medium effort.
- Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active. Start low and go slow!
- Warm up and cool down at an easy pace, especially after exercise so you don't feel lightheaded.
- Avoid straining or holding your breath when lifting weights. This can cause large changes in blood pressure that increase your risk of passing out or developing abnormal heart rhythms.

Other Ideas for Physical Activity and Health

Aerobic activity and strength training are the heart of a program for those with high blood pressure. However, you may enjoy and benefit from these other options.

Take Charge

Exercise and medications play major roles in reducing blood pressure. But other factors help too. Eat healthy foods and lower salt intake. Lose weight if needed. Lower your stress. Get better sleep. Stop smoking. Don't drink too much alcohol.

Yoga, Tai Chi, and Pilates

All help with balance, flexibility and strength. They can lower blood pressure and reduce stress too! Avoid fast-paced hot yoga. Some high blood pressure medicines may make it more difficult to control your body temperature.

Flexibility exercises

Stretch your muscles 2-3 days/week to the point of feeling tightness. Hold for 10 - 30 seconds (30-60 seconds for older adults). For example, stretch your calves or the back of your thighs.

Take More Steps

Use a smart phone or activity tracker to measure your progress and stay motivated. Count your steps daily for the first week or two. Gradually build up to 7,000-9,000 steps/day.

More Help

For more information about high blood pressure, go to: [cdc.gov/bloodpressure](https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure)

Go to www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro to find an ACSM certified exercise professional near you.

How will I get started **this week?** _____
