

# Exercise: A drug-free approach to lowering high blood pressure

Regular physical activity makes your heart stronger. A stronger heart can pump more blood with less effort. If your heart can work less to pump, the force on your arteries decreases, lowering your blood pressure.

## Exercise can lower your blood pressure

Activity is the prescription for better heart health. In fact, regular exercise can lower your blood pressure as much as some medications can.

Plus, if your blood pressure is at a desirable level (less than 120/80 mm Hg), exercise can help prevent it from rising as you age.

It takes about one to three months for regular exercise to have an impact on your blood pressure. The key is to stick to it, because the benefits last only as long as you continue to exercise.



**Your risk of high blood pressure increases with age, but adding exercise into your daily routine can make a big difference. And if your blood pressure is already high, exercise can help you control it.**

## How much exercise do you need?

Aerobic activity can be an effective way to control high blood pressure. But flexibility and strengthening exercises such as Pilates and lifting weights are also important parts of an overall fitness plan. Any physical activity that increases your heart and breathing rates is considered aerobic activity, including:

- Household chores, such as mowing the lawn, raking leaves, gardening or scrubbing the floor
- Active sports, such as basketball or tennis
- Climbing stairs
- Walking
- Jogging
- Bicycling
- Swimming
- Dancing



**Aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity most days of the week. If you have trouble finding 30 minutes for exercise, you can break up your workout into three 10-minute sessions of aerobic exercise and get the same benefit as one 30-minute session.**



## Weight training and high blood pressure

Weight training can cause a temporary increase in blood pressure during exercise. But it can also have long-term benefits to blood pressure that outweighs the risk of a temporary spike for most people.

**It's recommended that everyone incorporate strength training exercises of all the major muscle groups into a fitness routine at least two times a week.**

## When you need your doctor's okay

Sometimes it's best to check with your doctor before you jump into an exercise program, especially if:

- You're a man older than age 45 or a woman older than age 55.
- You smoke or quit smoking in the past six months.
- You're overweight.
- You have a chronic health condition, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease or lung disease.
- You have high cholesterol or high blood pressure.
- You've had a heart attack.
- You have a family history of heart-related problems before age 55 in men and age 65 in women.
- You feel pain or discomfort in your chest, jaw, neck or arms during activity.
- You become dizzy with exertion.
- You're unsure if you're in good health, or you haven't been exercising regularly.

Also, if you take any medication regularly, ask your doctor if exercising will make it work differently or change its side effects — or if your medication will affect the way your body reacts to exercise. And remember, exercise can be great medicine, too!

Adapted from: The Mayo Clinic website, Exercise: A Drug-Free Approach to Lowering High Blood Pressure, mayoclinic.org, (accessed October 2015).

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