

# Physical activity and your blood pressure

Having high blood pressure can lead to health problems, such as heart disease, stroke or kidney problems.

The good news is physical activity can help!

This handout describes:

- how much physical activity you should do; and
- how physical activity can affect your blood pressure.

## How much physical activity should I do?

It is important to be active most days of the week. *Aerobic activities* can help improve and manage your blood pressure.

*Aerobic activities* work your heart and lungs, such as walking, cycling, jogging, cross-country skiing and swimming.

The following table describes your aerobic physical activity “prescription.”

Aerobic Physical Activity “Prescription”	
<b>How often?</b>	<p>Aim for <i>150 minutes of aerobic activity per week</i>.</p> <p>This could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• shorter sessions: 10 minutes, 3 times/day</li><li>• longer sessions: 30 or more minutes/day, 5 or more days/week</li></ul>
<b>How hard?</b>	<p>Try to work at a <i>moderate-to-vigorous</i> intensity.</p> <p>This means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• your heart beats faster</li><li>• you are sweating lightly</li><li>• breathing is deeper and faster</li><li>• you can still talk easily, but not sing</li></ul>

## What aerobic activities would you like to do?

Note: A qualified exercise professional can show you some safe exercises that work best for you.

When you begin a new activity, start at your own comfort level.

As you become used to doing the activity, you can slowly increase:

- **how long** you are active
- **how often** you are active
- **how hard** you work

## How does physical activity affect my blood pressure?

**While you are *doing* an aerobic activity, your blood pressure changes.**

- The top number (called systolic) will rise when you are active. The harder you work, the higher this number can go.
- The bottom number (called diastolic) will stay about the same. In some people it may drop slightly. This is normal.
- If your blood pressure is too high, your health care provider may
  - ✧ tell you to monitor your blood pressure when you are active; or
  - ✧ give you blood pressure ranges, so you can stay safe when active.

**Your blood pressure will be lower *after* you have done an aerobic physical activity.**

- This decrease in your blood pressure can last several hours. This is one of the reasons why daily physical activity is recommended; you get health benefits right away!

- Often, those with very high blood pressure will see the greatest change.
- You may see a larger decrease if your physical activity session is longer, or if you work harder.

**What is your current blood pressure?**

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**What is your ideal blood pressure?**

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## Blood pressure changes **OVERTIME**

Over time, regular physical activity may help you reach a healthy blood pressure level.

### **Fun Fact:**

Most people who become regularly active can lower their systolic blood pressure by *seven points* and their diastolic pressure by *five points*.

Such as:

- Blood pressure before becoming active = 154/98
- Blood pressure after 4 months of being active = 147/93

The more often you are active, the sooner you may see these changes.

*Keep it fun. Make physical activity a big part of your life.*



## More benefits

Being physically active on a regular basis can give you many other benefits, such as:

- reducing your need for blood pressure medication;
- improving how well your heart works;
- giving you more control over your body weight;
- helping you to manage stress;
- improving how well you sleep; and
- boosting your energy and strength.

## Remember:

- Aerobic physical activities can help you manage and improve your blood pressure.
- You will see many other benefits from being more active.
- Keep it fun! Make fun physical activity a lasting part of your life.

What is one thing you can do *today* to start being more active?