

Stroke: how to stay safe when active



Aerobic, resistance, balance, and flexibility physical activities can help improve your symptoms after having a stroke.

- **Aerobic activities** make you breathe a little harder and begin to sweat. Aim for 150 minutes of aerobic activities each week, such as walking or cycling. Before starting aerobic training, ask your doctor if there are any medical conditions that require special consideration when exercising.
- **Resistance activities** make you use your muscles to push, pull or lift. Try to do resistance activities 2 to 3 days a week.
- **Balance activities** help to keep you on your feet and reduce your risk of falling. Balance activities should be done 2 to 3 days a week.
- **Flexibility activities** lengthen and stretch muscles that are tight or restrained. They can help prevent injuries and muscle and joint pain throughout the body. Flexibility activities should be done 2 to 3 days a week.

Medications and your safety

Are you on medication for your blood pressure, such as a diuretic, beta blocker or similar medication? Check with your healthcare provider to find out.

You can still be physically active, but you will need to follow a few safety steps.

- 1) Be sure to discuss your medications with your doctor before starting your physical activity program.
 - ▶ Some medications may raise or lower your heart rate and blood pressure when you are at rest or when exercising.
 - ▶ Patients on Warfarin medication to prevent blood clots may have a higher risk of bleeding if they are bruised.

This handout for adults gives you information to help you stay safe when you are active.

Topics include:

- medication,
- blood pressure awareness, and
- general safety tips for physical activity.

2) Your medication may affect your blood sugar levels. This may make you feel a bit light-headed. If you feel light-headed or dizzy:

- ▶ stop your activity, or slow down,
- ▶ take a glucose tablet, or eat a piece of candy, and
- ▶ do not resume your activity until you feel well.

3) Stay cool. Your medication may make it harder for your body to cool itself when you are active. Keep your body cool by:

- ▶ drinking lots of water while being active,
- ▶ being active in the morning or evening when it is cooler (if the weather is hot or humid), and
- ▶ decreasing the intensity (how hard you push yourself) and/or the length of time you are active when the weather or workout location is hot or humid.

Blood pressure while you exercise

Before participating in a physical activity.

Work with your doctor to determine your safe blood pressure limits during any exercise. Check your blood pressure before you begin your physical activity to ensure that it is within a safe range.

When the weather is very cold, hot or humid, try exercising indoors.



During physical activity, your blood pressure will change.

- 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 the systolic blood pressure lowers or remains the same during exercise, **STOP** exercising and contact your physician or healthcare provider.
- If your blood pressure is too high, your healthcare 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.



Check your blood pressure before you begin your physical activity to ensure that it is within a safe range.

Your blood pressure may 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 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?

What is your ideal blood pressure?

Blood pressure changes OVER TIME

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

If you have trouble maintaining a stable blood pressure, talk with your physician before continuing any physical activity program.

Other safety considerations after having a stroke

- Be sure to discuss your physical activity plan with a healthcare professional to ensure that there are no conditions that would interfere with your participation in a program. In your plan, discuss how much, how often and how hard you should exercise to reduce your chances of fatigue and/or injury.
- Start with light physical activity for the first few weeks in your program and only increase the load or repetitions if muscle soreness or fatigue no longer occur.
- If you are at risk of falling, consider using a device to support you during your activities. For example, use a harness when you are on a treadmill; or hold onto a chair when you are doing balance or stretching activities. Be sure to pick activities that are safe and fun for you!
- Pay attention to your body and know the signs. Regularly check your heart rate and blood pressure during exercise. If you have any of the following symptoms, stop your physical activity and ask your doctor before starting again:
 - ▶ Light-headedness or dizziness
 - ▶ Cold or clammy skin
 - ▶ Excessive thirst
 - ▶ Nausea, vomiting or severe headache
 - ▶ Chest heaviness, pain, or tightness; angina
 - ▶ Pain or discomfort towards the jaw or arm
 - ▶ Heart palpitations (racing, pounding, or fluttering)
 - ▶ Seizures
 - ▶ Trembling
 - ▶ Irritability, nervousness, confusion
 - ▶ Sudden shortness of breath not due to increased activity
 - ▶ Excessive sweating
 - ▶ Discomfort or stiffness in muscles and joints persisting for several days after exercising

General Safety Tips

Here are some general safety tips to keep in mind when you are active.

- Always warm-up and cool-down.
- Listen to your body and take breaks as needed.
- Drink water before, during and after physical activity.
- Wear your medical alert/ID bracelet.

Remember:

Physical activity can help you manage and improve your symptoms after having a stroke. It may also help prevent a second stroke.

But make sure you stay safe and have fun when being physically active.



Start with light physical activity for the first few weeks, and only increase the load or repetitions if muscle soreness or fatigue no longer occur.

Topics in this toolkit:

- A. Taking the first step: deciding to be physically active
- B. Making a physical activity plan
- C. Setting goals for physical activity
- D. What stops you from being physically active?
- E. Benefits of physical activity
- F. Physical activity and your blood pressure
- G. High blood pressure safety
- H. Physical activity and Type 2 diabetes
- I. Diabetes safety
- J. Healthy weight and physical activity
- K. Physical activity and anxiety
- L. Anxiety safety
- M. Physical activity and chronic heart failure
- N. Chronic heart failure safety
- O. Physical activity and stroke
- P. Stroke safety
- Q. Physical activity and Parkinson's Disease
- R. Parkinson's Disease safety
- S. Physical activity and dementia
- T. Dementia safety

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