

# Exercising With High Blood Pressure

If you have high blood pressure, exercise can make a big difference. Regular physical activity makes your heart stronger. It also can lower your blood pressure and protect you from heart disease and stroke.

## How Much Physical Activity Do I Need?

Research shows that adults need regular physical activity to keep their heart healthy. Both aerobic activity and strength training offer benefits.

### Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity means getting your body moving. It can lower your systolic blood pressure by approximately 5 to 8 mmHg. For most people, the goal is to be physically active 150 minutes a week.

**Start slowly.** If you haven't been active recently, start with 10 to 15 minutes of gentle activity. Slowly increase your activity by 5 to 10 minutes every couple weeks.

**Be active throughout the week.** Try to add some activity every day—even small amounts at a time. You'll be surprised how quickly you reach your goals!

**Warm up and cool down.** Do 5 minutes of an easier-paced exercise to warm up and cool down.

**Use the “talk test.”** Follow these guidelines to be sure you're getting the right level of exercise:

- **Moderate level**—You can still talk but can't sing.
- **Vigorous level**—You can say only a few words before taking a breath.

### Strength Training

Strength training makes the muscles do more work than they are used to. It can lower systolic blood pressure by approximately 4 to 5 mmHg. For most people, the goal is to work all muscle groups at least 2 days a week.

**Start slowly.** Begin with a few exercises that are not too hard, and add new exercises as you get stronger. Work up to doing two or three sets of 8 to 10 repetitions for each muscle group.

**Work all muscle groups.** Choose exercises that work each of your muscle groups: legs, hips, abdomen, chest, back, shoulders and arms.

#### Follow these tips to lift weights safely:

- Use the correct technique. If you are not sure, ask an exercise professional for instructions.
- Avoid lifting too much weight.
- Stop lifting a weight when you feel tired.
- Don't hold your breath when lifting.



## Sutter Resources

Before starting a new physical activity plan, check with your healthcare team.

Go to [sutterhealth.org](https://sutterhealth.org) to learn more about high blood pressure. You may find local resources by going to [sutterhealth.org/classes-events](https://sutterhealth.org/classes-events) and selecting the topics “Fitness” and “Heart Health.”

### Did You Know?

Regular physical activity can:

- Improve your sleep
- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Ward off depression
- Help you maintain or lose weight
- Improve your memory

## At a Glance: How Much Physical Activity Do I Need?

### Moderate Aerobic 150 minutes a week

- Active Yoga
- Bicycling
- Dancing
- Exercise Class
- Tennis (doubles)
- Walking briskly
- Yard or home repair work

OR

### Vigorous Aerobic 75 minutes a week

- Aerobic dancing
- Bicycling 10 miles per hour or faster
- Heavy gardening (digging or hoeing)
- Hiking uphill or with a heavy backpack
- Racewalking, jogging or running
- Swimming laps
- Tennis (singles)

AND

### Strength Training 2 days a week, working all your muscle groups

- Exercises that use your body weight for resistance (planks, sit-ups, push-ups, lunges)
- Lifting weights
- Working with resistance bands

## Don't Forget to Stretch

For the best results, stretch after your workout. Stretching can improve your flexibility and movement.

- Stretch your neck, arms, wrists, waist, hips, back, legs, ankles and toes.
- Hold each stretch for three to five deep breaths. Avoid bouncing or stretching to the point of pain.
- Repeat each stretch three to five times.

## Exercise Safely

Moderate physical activity is safe for most people. But before you start a new activity plan, talk to your healthcare team. Working together, you can set the right goals for you.

Drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise unless you were instructed otherwise. Exercise indoors if it's really hot, humid or cold outside.

If you take high blood pressure medications, be aware of how they can affect your activity.

- Beta blockers and some other blood pressure medications may affect your heart rate.
- Diuretics may increase your risk for dehydration.
- Discuss your medications, and when to take them, with your doctor or healthcare team.

## Know When to Get Help

If possible, measure your blood pressure before exercising. If the numbers are very high or low, then don't exercise and contact your healthcare team:

- **Very high**—higher than 180 top (systolic) or higher than 120 bottom (diastolic) and your numbers remain high after resting for five minutes.
- **Very low**—lower than 100/50 **and** you feel dizzy.

Stop exercising if you feel sudden pain or discomfort that increases quickly. If the pain or discomfort doesn't go away when you stop, contact your healthcare team. Seek care immediately if you have any of these symptoms:

- Chest pain, discomfort or pressure.
- Discomfort or pain in the arm, neck, jaw, back or stomach.
- Shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea or irregular heartbeat.
- Discomfort in your stomach (abdomen) that may feel like heartburn.

### Additional Resources

- [heart.org](http://heart.org)  
American Heart Association
- [health.gov/moveyourway](http://health.gov/moveyourway)  
US Department of Health and Human Services