



Hypertension & Physical Activity

The risk of developing cardiovascular disease (such as a heart attack or stroke) and kidney damage increase with higher blood pressures.

Blood pressure is reduced for anything up to 24 hours following a single dose of activity and this seems to be maintained if done regularly. By being regularly active you are having a positive effect on other very important risks factor such as high cholesterol, high triglyceride (fat in blood), blood sugars and kidney impairment. **Strong evidence suggests that being active lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease by 20% to 35%.¹** Your health risk will start to improve as soon as you move more; unlike many other medical therapies, physical activity protects and treats every part of the body.

Regular physical activity also gives you more energy, builds confidence and can help you to sleep more soundly

at night. You can combine your activity time with family and friends or use it as an opportunity to reflect on things and listen to your favourite music.



Physical Activity Recommendations for currently inactive adults with hypertension

Aim to do the following three types of activity:

-  **Aerobic activity** at relative moderate intensity for at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week – one way to approach this is to do 30 minutes on at least five days each week.
-  **Muscle strengthening activity** on two or more days a week which work all major muscles groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulder and arms)
-  **Flexibility exercises** on a daily basis



Plan your lifestyle change

Keep it simple: Don't make drastic commitments. Choose activities that are easy, simple and enjoyable to maintain.

Set a goal and monitor: Set weekly targets that are achievable and keep a record of what you do. If you fail, create barriers to the things that stop you from reaching them.

Go Public: Discuss your goals and activities with others to keep you motivated for longer.

See 'Getting started' at www.prescription4exercise.com for useful tips on planning your next move.



Do not worry if you struggle to meet the recommendations, because by trying to become more active, you are still gaining some health benefits

Aerobic activity



Aerobic activity, also known as endurance activity, is when large muscle movements, maintained over a period of time, make the heart and lungs work harder.

Activity Type? – Any type that you can maintain comfortably is ideal. Choose exercises that you enjoy, such as walking, cycling or group fitness classes. Aerobic activities are really important if you want to improve the health of your heart and circulation.

How long (duration)? – You can split your total activity amount into minimum bouts of 10 minutes if needed. If you have been inactive for a long time, start with short daily amounts and increase this as your body allows and you feel more confident.

Remember not to sit for hours. A regular break from sitting every hour is healthy.

How hard (intensity)? – Progress slowly to a relatively moderate-intensity activity. When doing moderate intensity activity you will feel warm, mildly out of breath and mildly sweaty. The ‘talk test’ is a simple way to measure moderate intensity. This means that you can still talk, but not sing, during the activity.

How often (frequency)? – If you aim to do 30 minutes per day then do this at least 5 times per week so that you reach the 150 minutes total per week. Distribute the sessions over the week and aim to have no more than 2 consecutive days without physical activity. When you start any new activities make sure you give your body enough time to recover and adapt between sessions.

Muscle Strengthening and Flexibility



Activities that promote strengthening and flexibility are vital for a complete physical activity programme. Being stronger and more flexible helps you to achieve aerobic activities, such as brisk walking or swimming, more successfully. You can find some notes and videos for some simple ‘Strength and Flexibility Exercises’ at www.prescription4exercise.com.

*See [prescription4exercise.com](http://www.prescription4exercise.com) for video examples of **strengthening and flexibility** exercises you can do at home

Safety considerations

- If you have led a very sedentary lifestyle, begin by doing low intensity exercise of short duration, e.g. 10 minutes. Increase your level of activity gradually to avoid injury
- Stop exercising if you feel dizzy, sick, unwell or very tired.
- See a doctor if you are having chest pain, black outs or breathlessness on mild exertion.
- Cool down slowly as some blood pressure medications reduce blood pressure too much if exercise is ended too quickly.
- Avoid holding your breath during weight training as this can cause large changes in your BP which may cause you to faint.
- Avoid exercises in which the head is lower than the heart as this can raise your blood pressure
- If your blood pressure is high, you should avoid lots of overhead arm work.

If you have any other long term health conditions ask your healthcare professional and/or visit [www.prescription4exercise](http://www.prescription4exercise.com) for additional useful safety considerations



Choosing the right activity

Where to start? Try to choose activities that are local, enjoyable and practical.
Visit the website for plenty of ideas and choices of things to do new you.

References

1. Department of Health and Human Services (2008) Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Report, Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services.

Further reading

- Start Active, Stay Active - a report on physical activity for health from the four home countries * Chief Medical Officers, UK Department of Health, July 2011. www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_128209
- ACSM's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription, American College of Sports Medicine, 2009
- Swedish National Institute of Public Health. Physical Activity in the Prevention and Treatment of Disease. Professional Associations for Physical Activity, Sweden, 2010. Hypertension, p400-425. <http://www.fyss.se>

Visit [www.prescription4exercise](http://www.prescription4exercise.com) to learn more about physical activity and how it can prevent and treat many long term conditions.

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