

Exercise and high blood pressure



What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the pressure of your blood on the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps it around your body. Your blood pressure will go up and down throughout the day. This depends on what you are doing, especially if you are exercising.

Blood pressure is usually shown as two numbers. The first number is systolic pressure. This is the pressure on your artery walls when your heart beats. The second number is diastolic pressure. This is the pressure on your artery walls when your heart rests.

It is often read as systolic over diastolic. For example, your doctor might tell you your blood pressure is "120 mmHg over 80 mmHg" which is a normal result.



What is hypertension?

If the top number on the blood pressure machine is over 140 mmHg or the bottom number is over 90 mmHg, you may be considered to have high blood pressure. Hypertension is when your blood pressure is permanently higher than normal.

Hypertension is a common issue affecting over 33% of all adult Australians. Often, people experience no symptoms at all, which is why it can be dangerous. It is also a major risk factor for heart disease and kidney disease.

This is why it is important to have your heart health checked regularly. Ask your health professional to check your blood pressure at your next appointment.



What causes high blood pressure?

High blood pressure doesn't have one specific cause. Factors that could increase your chances of developing it include:

- Little or no exercise
- Smoking
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- A diet high in salt
- Being overweight
- Family history
- Stress
- Ageing.

How can I lower my blood pressure?

In most cases, high blood pressure can be treated by making lifestyle changes, including:

- Getting your blood pressure checked regularly
- Doing regular physical activity
- Improving your diet to reduce salt and fat
- Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Maintaining a healthy body weight
- Limiting your alcohol intake
- Quitting smoking
- Looking after your mental health.



Exercise and high blood pressure

Exercise is often the first thing suggested to help you lower your blood pressure. Exercise also improves your heart health.

Research says that regular light exercise can reduce your blood pressure. Consistent strength exercise like lifting weights is helpful too.

Some people also need medication to help reduce their blood pressure to a normal level. Medication can be very good at lowering blood pressure, but some can have side effects. Discuss this with your doctor or health professional.



The benefits of exercise

Some of the benefits of regular aerobic exercise include:

- Reduces the risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, and stroke
- Helps manage blood pressure and cholesterol
- Strengthens your heart, lungs, and muscles
- Helps to manage stress
- Improves your mood.

What exercise can I do?

If you suffer from high blood pressure, discuss starting an exercise program with your health professional.

The American College of Sports Medicine recommends trying 30 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercise on most days of the week.

You could try activities like these:

- Brisk walking
- Gardening
- Moderate to heavy housework
- Dancing
- Home exercises.

Try moving every day

Look for ways to add more physical activity into your daily routine. Making small changes in your lifestyle can make a big difference in your overall health.

Here are some examples:

- Take a walk for 10 or 15 minutes after having a meal
- Take the stairs instead of escalators and elevators
- Park farther from the store and walk through the parking lot.



Tips for exercising with high blood pressure:

- Seek medical advice before beginning a new exercise program if your blood pressure is high
- Avoid any intense heavy weightlifting
- Breathe normally and try to avoid holding your breath
- Avoid exercising in hot humid environments
- Stay well hydrated.



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LiveUp is a healthy ageing initiative funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.