

## Staying safe continued

If you get any of the following problems, get medical advice from your GP or by contacting NHS Direct (see below):

- Discomfort in your chest or upper body brought on by physical activity
- Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness during your activity
- Dizziness or nausea on exertion
- Fainting during or just after doing physical activity
- Palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.

Remember: The more active you are, the more benefits you will get.

# Be active - be safe - have fun!

### For more information

- Blood Pressure Association 020 8772 4994 or [www.bpassoc.org.uk](http://www.bpassoc.org.uk)
- BBC Online Health [www.bbc.co.uk/health/heart](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/heart)
- British Heart Foundation 020 7935 0185 or [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)
- NHS Direct 0845 4647 or [www.nhsdirect.co.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.co.uk)
- SportEX Health - information on physical activity [www.sportex.net](http://www.sportex.net)

### Local information

## HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

### WHAT IS IT?



Blood is pumped around the body by the heart. It is circulated through vessels known as arteries, and smaller vessels known as capillaries. When the heart contracts to force blood into these vessels, your blood pressure increases. When the heart relaxes your blood pressure goes down. This is why your blood pressure measurement is made up of two figures, the pressure during contraction and the pressure during relaxation. High blood pressure is also known as hypertension.

### WHAT CAUSES HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?



In a few cases there is a specific reason for high blood pressure. For example if your kidneys or adrenal glands are not working correctly. However most of the time there is no specific reason or cause for high blood pressure. There are some causes you may not be able to influence, for example having a family history of high blood pressure or being of non-white origin. However there are many causes to do with your lifestyle that you can change to reduce your risk of having high blood pressure, or reducing your pressure if it is already too high. These include being overweight, eating too much salt and cholesterol, drinking too much alcohol, being physically inactive and not eating enough fruit and vegetables.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

If you suffer from high blood pressure then you have an increased risk of suffering from heart disease, stroke and heart failure. Prolonged high blood pressure causes damage to your blood vessels which can lead to the vessels becoming narrowed. This increases the likelihood of the vessel becoming blocked and can cause damage to the heart or brain. The higher your blood pressure, the higher the risk of heart disease so any changes you can make to reduce your blood pressure will help to reduce this risk.

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# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

## How does physical activity help if you have hypertension?

- Your blood pressure measurement is made up of two numbers - for example 140/85mmHg. The first number is the pressure during heartbeats (systolic pressure), and the second is the pressure between heartbeats (diastolic pressure). Regular physical activity can lower systolic pressure by 10mmHg, and diastolic by 8mmHg.
- People usually get the biggest reduction in blood pressure within the first 10 weeks of activity. But you need to remain active to maintain the benefits.
- Increasing your level of activity helps speed up your metabolism. This helps you to burn more calories and, as long as you don't eat more to compensate for this, you will lose weight.
- Physical activity helps reduce other risk factors for heart disease such as high blood cholesterol levels, developing diabetes and the risk of having a stroke.
- Physical activity, along with a healthy diet, helps reduce stress and improves your overall feeling of well-being and quality of life, and helps you to sleep well.
- It also reduces the risk of bowel cancer, osteoporosis and the risk of falling.

## What type of activity is best?

While stamina-based activity is particularly important for high blood pressure, you also need to include some strength and flexibility-based activity to get the best health gains.

**Stamina-type activities:** Walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, tennis and housework (washing floors or windows)

**Strength-type activities:** Walking uphill, carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (digging or mowing) and housework

**Flexibility-type activities:** Dancing, yoga, Pilates, T'ai Chi and gardening

## Tips on increasing your activity level

- Walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. Perhaps take a dog for a walk to make it more interesting.
- Look for opportunities to be active during your whole day. For example park at the far end of the car park, or walk one stop further to catch the bus, and take 10 minutes out of your lunch break to go for a walk.
- Try using the stairs instead of the escalator. If you do use the escalator start by walking part of the way up and gradually progress to walking up the whole way.
- Choose activities that you enjoy doing. Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable.

## How much and how often?

**Frequency** Your main aim is to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week. If this seems too much to start with, try starting with 3 x 10 minute walks spread throughout the day and work towards 2 x 15 minute walks and then 30 continuous minutes. One goal is to try and increase your activity by 2 minutes each day.

**Intensity** Moderate intensity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time.

**Advice** Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases until after about 10 minutes you have reached the level you can maintain for your chosen period of activity. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually.

**Remember** Set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off.

## Staying safe

- It is important to have your blood pressure checked before starting any activity. If your blood pressure is normal you should have it checked at least every five years, if it is raised you should have it checked at least once a year.
- It is safe to exercise with high blood pressure unless it is very high and your GP will advise you about this when you have your blood pressure checked.
- If you do not know how much physical activity you can do safely or you have other medical problems such as arthritis, ask your GP or practice nurse for advice.
- Avoid 'high intensity resistance training', for example lifting heavy weights.
- Make sure you don't hold your breath, especially if you are lifting anything heavy such as suitcases, as this temporarily increases your blood pressure and puts additional strain on your heart.
- Beta-blockers reduce your heart rate so when exercising don't use your heart rate as a way of telling how hard you are working, or when to slow down.
- It is important to make sure you take your medication so your blood pressure is well-maintained.