

HOW DOES PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AFFECT MY BLOOD PRESSURE?

Regular physical activity makes your heart stronger so it can pump more blood with less effort. This means there will be less force on your arteries, lowering your blood pressure. If your blood pressure is normal, activity can keep it from rising. If you have hypertension, managing your blood pressure can help to prevent complications or other health problems.

There are both short and long-term benefits of physical activity in managing your blood pressure. While you are participating in an aerobic activity your blood pressure will change. The top number rises and the bottom number stays about the same.

Aerobic activity can include walking, biking, swimming or any movement that increases your heart and breathing rates (household chores, yard work, etc.). After you are finished an activity, your blood pressure will be lower and can last several hours.

Physical activity can be as effective as some medications! In fact, people who become regularly active can lower their systolic blood pressure (the top number) by 4-9 points (from 154 to 145, for example). It can take one to three months to see this impact on blood pressure.

However, the more often you are active, the sooner you may see these changes. Before starting a new activity, it's best to check with your doctor first. Ensure you stay within your own comfort level, always do a warm-up before and cool-down afterwards.

Don't forget to stay hydrated by drinking water. You can slowly increase how long you are active, how often you are active or how hard you are working to see further benefits.

The goal is to get 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous aerobic activity. Keep in mind – 10 minute sessions count too! Strength training can have long term benefits on blood pressure, however it is important to learn the proper form, do not hold your breath, lift lighter weights more times, and listen to your body.

We should aim to do strength exercises for all major muscle groups at least two days per week.

Monitoring your blood pressure at home or with your health care provider can let you know if your physical activity is helping you to lower your blood pressure. In addition, being more active gives you more control over your body weight, helps manage stress, improves sleep, and boosts energy. Mosaic Primary Care Network's kinesiologists provide patients with information and tools to increase their activity levels. Speak with your family physician for a referral to the program or visit www.mosaicpcn.ca to learn more about how our programs can help you get active!